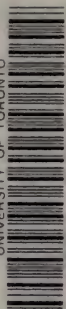


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A COMMENTARY ON THE WRITINGS

OF

HENRIK IBSEN

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# A COMMENTARY

ON THE

# WRITINGS OF HENRIK IBSEN

BY

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## NOTE.

THE commentary on the historical plays is included in the Introduction; while separate chapters are devoted to the social dramas. The translations from the Norwegian text are in most cases my own; though I have also used the versions of William and Charles Archer, where I have found them available. For the metrical renderings of passages from "Brand" and the "Poems," I am myself solely responsible.

HJALMAR HJORTH BOYESEN.

"THE MOORLANDS," SOUTHAMPTON, LONG ISLAND,  
September, 1893.



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## INTRODUCTION.

IN reading consecutively the whole series of Ibsen's dramas, one is apt to be seized with a kind of philosophic despair. The more radically you think of the problems of human existence, the more deeply you seek to penetrate them, the more insoluble they seem to become. Of course I am aware that any final solution, even if possible, would not be desirable. It would be a calamity. Humanity would stagnate, grow torpid and indolent; and its glorious evolution would be arrested, if each new generation were not confronted with urgent riddles, both abstract and concrete, clamouring for solution. There is, however, no danger of our incurring degeneration and decay by guessing, once for all, the riddle of the Sphinx, and witnessing its plunge into the abysmal void. It is an evidence of our spiritual vitality that we have no lack of problems, and cannot desist from persist-

ent, though discouraging, attempts to grapple with them. Our fathers, who troubled themselves little about these things, found life proportionately easier ; but they were in the same proportion inferior to their descendants ; and I do not doubt that the twentieth century will further multiply the crop of problems, and look upon the nineteenth with something of that supercilious benevolence with which we regard the eighteenth.

The spirit that questions accepted truisms, that reveals pitfalls where we fancied ourselves safe, and feels the storm in advance, in spite of the official fair-weather signals, therefore urges its possessor to a thankless but by no means unprofitable labour. This is Ibsen's peculiar mission. His is the wholesomely stimulating "spirit that denies." For, as the Lord says in the Prologue to "Faust," —

Man's activity is all too prone to slacken.  
He soon will love an absolute repose.  
Therefore I willingly give him a comrade  
Who goads and works and must create — as devil.

I mean no disrespect to Ibsen (for whom I have a profound admiration) in here implying a comparison with Mephistopheles, in the creative capacity which

Goethe attributes to him. With the animus of Mephisto's denials he has, probably, no affinity, though there are passages in Ibsen (notably his poem "To my Friend the Revolutionary Orator," where he declares his willingness "to place 'neath the ark the torpedo most cheerfully") which hint at a closer relationship to Faust's sneering companion than I should venture directly to charge. I fancy that I detect in Ibsen a certain cynical satisfaction in discovering the worm in the apple, the flaw in the diamond, the rift in the lute. This satisfaction is, perhaps, an inevitable concomitant of the excellence of the work. Nevertheless, instead of dismissing the charge, I will endeavour to explain and define it.

Social criticism, in order to be fruitful, must, as its first premise, presuppose the rationality, if not the goodness, of the universe. Otherwise it leads nowhere. Goethe's philosophy of life, as it was gradually evolved through a long and nobly expanding observation, has been helpful to thousands, and will be helpful to thousands yet unborn, because of a certain Olympian clearness and serenity in its unbiassed truth-seeking. There is absolutely no infusion of "temper" in it; no optimistic or pessi-

mistic preferences which warp the conclusions or colour the processes of his thinking. And yet we are always, in reading Goethe, arriving at positive results ; and the recognition of evolution, with its boundless promise, is perceived as the underlying principle of his philosophy. Though he utterly repudiates nine-tenths of the scientific, religious, and philosophic traditions of his day, he furnishes a new and nobler philosophy based upon larger and more daring generalisations. The mere spectacle of life with its bright pageantry was to him so entrancingly interesting that he imparts to us, by his own relish, a kind of contagious delight in its colour, its movement, its deep significance.

My grievance against Ibsen is not that he lacks this pleasure in life's outward pageant, but that I can detect no dominant principle underlying his criticism of life. He seems to be in ill humour with humanity and the plan of creation in general (if, indeed, he recognises such a plan), and he devotes himself with ruthless satisfaction to showing what a paltry, contemptible lot men are, and how aimless, futile, and irrational their existence is on this earth, with its chaotic strivings and bewildered endeavours. There

is no glimpse anywhere, as far as I have been able to ascertain, of Goethe's conviction that —

A good man, through obscurest aspiration,  
Has still an instinct of the one true way.

For all that, Ibsen has, according to his own statement, an abiding faith in evolution, though he is apparently all out of patience with its lagging and erratic snail-pace. In a speech which he made at a banquet given in his honour in Stockholm, he uttered the following significant sentences: —

“I believe that the scientific doctrine of evolution is applicable also in the domain of the intellectual life. . . . I believe that a time is *soon* to come when the political idea and the social idea will cease to exist under their present forms, and that from the two a unity will arise which will contain the conditions of human happiness. . . . I believe that poetry, philosophy, and religion will merge themselves into a new category — a new vital power — of which we, at the moment at which we are living, can not form a very distinct idea. . . . I have been told on many occasions that I am a pessimist. Well, so I am, in the sense that I do not believe in the

eternity of human ideals. But I am likewise an optimist in the sense that I believe in the possibility of transmuting and developing these ideals. . . . To speak more plainly, I believe that the ideals of our age, in disappearing, have a tendency to become what in my drama, 'Emperor and Galilean,' I have designated under the name, 'The Third Empire.'"

It would appear from this that it is the radicalism of Ibsen's optimism which makes him a pessimist. He is not content to wait for "the Third Empire," even though he believes that it is close at hand.

Widely remote as Ibsen is from Shelley, he is not entirely free from what I may call the latter's millennial discontent. The hints which we derive from the above-named trilogy as to the man of "the Third Empire" and his condition, remind one vaguely of "The Revolt of Islam" and "Prometheus Unbound." Only Shelley's anarchism had a rosy suffusion of hope which Ibsen, in spite of his assertion to the contrary, somehow seems to lack. But Ibsen's man of the future is to be apparently as untrammelled in his desires and actions, as unfettered by considerations of



what we now call morality, as the bloodless human abstractions of which the loveliest of English poets fabled in his delirious visions of the Elysian age to come. And again, Ibsen is, to my mind, as philosophically unsound as was Shelley. He has no more conception of the value of the restraining agencies with which man, as a mere measure of self-preservation, has been obliged to hedge himself in. He has the same titanic impatience with Philistine morality, though, to be sure, he has not, like Shelley, given any practical illustration of his disdain. Furthermore, he utterly undervalues what we call civilisation, which he regards primarily as an ignominious compromise—a surrender and curtailment—of our natural rights and liberties, in return for a paltry security for life and limb. I may possibly overstate his position; but who can read “An Enemy of the People,” with its emphatic declaration, that “the strongest man is he who stands most alone,”<sup>1</sup> without deriving the impression that he is more

<sup>1</sup> A kindred sentiment is expressed by Schiller in “Wilhelm Tell,” I. 3, v. 437:—

Der Starke ist am mächtigsten allein.

alive to the drawbacks of civilisation than to its advantages? He repudiates the "*contrat social*" and all obligations which involve detriment to the individual character. The most precious result, to him, of this confused turmoil which we call life is the eminent, the powerful personality; and because he believes that civilisation is not conducive to its development, but rather to its repression, he condemns civilisation. He has apparently no appreciation of the tremendous struggle, the immense suffering, the deluge of blood and tears, which it has cost to redeem the world from that predatory liberty which he admires, and to build up gradually the safeguards of organised society which he so detests. That unrestrained individualism which Ibsen, by inference, celebrates had a magnificent trial in Iceland during the Sturlung period, and it ended, as might have been expected, in anarchy and exhaustion. The great predatory men, whose strength of will was indeed unquestioned, ended by destroying each other. The freedom of the one in such a state of society means, as Ibsen is well aware, the thralldom of thousands. The triumphant expan-



sion of one, in daring thought and deed, means a corresponding contraction and impoverishment of the lives of thousands who lack opportunity or strength for successful resistance.

This, you will say, is the plan which Nature has adopted throughout her kingdom, and it is beneficent in securing the survival of the strong. Yes, if by strength is meant brute force, — successful self-assertion, — it undoubtedly ensures its survival. There was a time, frequently called the heroic age, when such survival was conducive to the highest ultimate good; but all historians and most philosophers agree that that time is past. It is now intellectual vigour rather than physical prowess, — it is brain rather than brawn, — which insures survival and dominance. Of course, the intellectual hero of to-day is no more an ultimate type which Nature will cherish and perpetuate, than the muscular hero of the tenth century. But it is the type which in the present transition she most needs, and which now best subserves her purpose. Whether there is (as Matthew Arnold assumed) any purpose in creation which “makes for righteousness,” I shall not undertake to dis-

cuss; but that there is a perceptible development toward higher and more complex forms of life and of social organisation, no man who is not wilfully blind can pretend to deny. That this organisation, at its present state of complexity, involves inconvenience and curtailment of happiness to many, may be readily admitted, but that its relaxation or abolishment would involve a thousand-fold more misery to a thousand times as many, seems to me equally self-evident.

Ibsen, if I read him aright, would calmly accept the latter chance, feeling confident that he himself would be among those few who, by dint of inborn strength, would know how to assert themselves, and who would reap more advantage than they would incur peril from the removal of legal restraints. When on one occasion he was discussing Russian conditions with Dr. Brandes, and praising the Czar's empire on account of "all the brilliant oppression there," his interlocutor expressed his astonishment. "Only think," said Ibsen, "of all the glorious love of liberty which it produces. Russia is one of the few countries of the earth where men still love Liberty and make

sacrifices for her. For this reason the country stands so high both in poetry and art. . . ."

"If all these good things result from oppression," Dr. Brandes replied, "then of course we ought to praise it. But the knout—do you include that, too, in your enthusiasm? Suppose now that you were a Russian and that your little boy there was to be knouted."

Ibsen sat silent for a moment, with an impenetrable air. Then he answered, laughing, "*Be* knouted, — he should not; but knout, — that he should." <sup>1</sup>

In spite of the laugh, this was, as I fancy, Ibsen's profoundest conviction. There was, of course, no other escape from so untenable a position. But it is perfectly in keeping with his undisguised partisanship for the knouters, in all departments of life, and his utter contempt for the knouted. Carlyle would have made a similar answer, if similarly questioned, and did, in fact, when pressed by Tourguéneff, seek refuge in the same paradox.

There is an apparent contradiction in Ibsen's admiration of despotism and his desire to abolish

<sup>1</sup> Brandes, "Det Moderne Gjennembruds Maend," pp. 93, 94.

the state with all its restraining agencies. He loves despotism, however, not as an ultimate condition, but as an indispensable transitional stage in the education of the races. It is part of what is the only positive content of his philosophy; viz. the wholesome discipline of sorrow, the educative power of suffering. There is scarcely a single one of his maturer plays in which this lesson is not more or less directly enforced. But even with this reservation, his anarchism seems to me precipitate, if not illogical.

It is, of course, a perfectly rational assumption, justified by the ethical development of the race, that humanity will, some time in the remote future, be able to dispense with the state. As in the course of ages that inherited remnant of the world's past barbarism which men call *evil* is gradually eliminated from our souls, the laws which society in self-defence framed against the evil-doer will become superfluous and lapse into desuetude. It is the beast of prey which yet lingers in many of us that makes locks and safes and iron gratings a necessity; when the beast of prey is extinct, as surely some day it will be, the locks and safes and

gratings will become extinct also. If there were no robbers, thieves, and murderers, the police would be an ornamental but superfluous luxury, and would soon be abolished; and they are not the only restraining agency, necessitated by the barbaric remnant, which the happier centuries to come will rejoice in renouncing.

This I fancied to be Ibsen's position, until I read his letter to Dr. Brandes on the subject of the Paris Commune of 1871.<sup>1</sup> But to my surprise, he there expresses an acute disappointment at the failure of those ferocious enthusiasts to establish a free and orderly government. He would apparently abolish the cage before the tiger is dead; and expect the beast, in grateful recognition of the trust that is reposed in him, to curb its predatory instincts and behave with the gentleness of a lap-dog. The same naïve expectation was expressed by Shelley, "the cardinal doctrine of whose faith it was" (according to his wife's testimony) "that if men *were but taught and induced* to treat their fellows with love, charity, and equal rights, this earth would be a paradise." Yes, *if* they could be so induced. But

<sup>1</sup> Brandes, *Det Moderne Gjennembruds Maend*, p. 100.

that is a colossal "if," showing a pathetic ignorance of the human heart with all its dusky recesses.

However, Shelley was a disciple of Rousseau and might be pardoned his millennial faith. But Ibsen, who is a contemporary of Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, and Tyndall, has less excuse for spreading so mischievous a doctrine. When he cites the Jews as an instance of a high individual development, which is directly due to "their not having had any state to drag along with them," he seems to forget that the Jews have benefited by the state devised and developed by others (not, however, without bearing their share of its burdens). Though they have had no political organisation of their own, they have surely not withdrawn from their civic obligations; still less have they lived in the ideal anarchic state which dispenses with those ten police regulations called the Decalogue. They seem, therefore, ill qualified to establish the claim which Ibsen makes in their favour.

The great charm of Ibsen is that he always deals with vital things. He is strong and virile, and opens to his reader long vistas of thought in unsuspected directions. He is a cosmopolitan spirit, betraying



only the faintest perceptible trace of the limitations of nationality. As a matter of fact, his ancestry is so complicated that nothing but the locality of his birth properly consigns him to Norway. His blood presents a mixture of Scotch, Danish, and German strains, into which no purely Norwegian strain seems to have entered. He was born March 20, 1828, in the little town of Skien, the chief industry of which is the sawing and exporting of lumber. Henrik Ibsen's grandfather was a sea-captain who was lost at sea; and his father, a merchant, once prosperous, but when his son was in his eighth year, a bankrupt. Henrik was a shy and silent child, who found no pleasure in the rough sports of boys, and accordingly was not popular among them. The jail, the pillory on the market-place, and the mad-house were the three objects which fascinated him the most and most potently stirred his imagination. In his sixteenth year, after having received a scanty education, he was sent to the little shipping town Grimstad, as apprentice to an apothecary. Here he spent five years in dreamy discontent. Like John Keats, similarly situated at Edmonton, he took to writing verses, and permitted his thoughts to soar consider-

ably above his gallipots. The young ladies of Grimstad did not in the least interest him, and he was to them a walking enigma. He cared for nothing that the ordinary young man in his position cares for. In the first place, he was not in the least convivial. He despised the vapid small-talk and gossip of the afternoon coffee or tea; he had no taste for whist, boston, or hot toddy; and last but not least, he could not dance. All the jovial poking of fun and humorous anecdotes of the returned skippers he listened to without the ghost of a smile. No wonder he was unpopular. A young chemist's apprentice with a rebellious head of hair and lips that shut like a vise, who drew caricatures of the leading citizens, and made epigrams on people who had been kind to him, was scarcely the style of man which the Grimstad sea-captains would find congenial.

Henrik Ibsen managed, in fact, in a short time to get on a war-footing with the worthy Philistines of Grimstad. I may as well add that I speak from personal knowledge in this matter; as during my many visits to the town between 1860 and 1869, I had frequent occasion to hear the opinions which



were entertained of the poet by his former fellow-townsmen. And to put it mildly, they were not complimentary. A small town, where everybody is interested in what his neighbour has for dinner, is invariably more intolerant of dissent, more tyrannical toward social rebels, than a city of metropolitan rank. Ibsen was understood to write poetry, to have political convictions of his own, and to entertain contemptuous opinions of his neighbours, — all unpardonable offences in the eyes of the average Philistine. He had the courage to say that it was the moral duty of Norway and Sweden to take the field against Germany in aid of Denmark in the Sleswick-Holstein war; and he counted eventual defeat as preferable to supine and perfidious inactivity. How must such a declaration have sounded in the ears of the utilitarian, ship-owning community in which he was living? The war would destroy the shipping, while neutrality would enable Norway to benefit by the troubles of her neighbours. That was the argument of the skippers, and one too self-evident to bear contradiction.

Now, insignificant though it may seem, there is the stuff of true tragedy in such a situation. We

have here already the problem which recurs in a dozen disguises in Ibsen's works, viz. the antagonism between the great man and society. The former, with his larger vision of life, is bound to get into collision with the latter, which is prone to take a meaner and narrower view. And this collision, whether its stage be a throne-room or a village drug shop, will arouse pain, defiance, hate, all the violent emotions of tragedy.

Schiller got the stuff for an immortal tragedy out of his rebellion against the military discipline of the Ducal Academy in Stuttgart. The chivalrous robber Karl Moor's declaration of war against society was inspired by the wrath of the boy, Friedrich Schiller, at the senseless regulations by which his will was curbed and his liberty perpetually restrained. Ibsen, in his malodorous confinement in the Grimstad apothecary shop, found a still more daring symbol for his smouldering rebellion. He wrote in those days a tragedy, "Catiline," the hero of which was the Roman conspirator whom Cicero has so eloquently maligned. He had a kind of historic outlook from his gallipots, and followed European events with an ardent interest. The Hungarian uprising of

1848 and 1849 aroused all his revolutionary enthusiasm, and the Polish rebellion of 1846 had enlisted his most fervent sympathy. These great events had stirred his mind deeply and produced a responsive vibration which lingered long, and refused to be allayed, until in some way the electric fluid was discharged. His tragedy served this purpose. It afforded an outlet for all the indignation which during these years had accumulated within him. The world was out of gear; liberty was crushed by tyranny; justice was a fiction; and outrage and wrong triumphed on every side. Such a world was scarcely worth saving; it deserved to be destroyed.

This, too, is the reasoning of Catiline in regard to the world empire of Rome. It is hopelessly corrupt, —rotten to the core. Catiline, being unable to redeem it, resolves to destroy it. The position of the hero between Aurelia and Furia, one of whom is his good and the other his evil genius, foreshadows a situation which recurs in "The Warriors of Helgeland," "Brand," and in other plays. Aurelia, his wife, is the loving, self-sacrificing, dutiful woman, who lives only in the man she loves; while Furia, his mistress, is ambitious, imperious, and unscrupu-

lous, but of a lofty daring which commands admiration. While Aurelia restrains Catiline, imploring him to rest content with his lot and her love, Furia incites him to deed, and if need be, to crime; and, though loving him, hurries him on to his destruction. Her nature is a complex one, and would require a maturer poet than Ibsen then was to do justice to her tangled motives. We learn that she is cherishing a murky, melodramatic plot of vengeance upon her lover, who has betrayed her sister Silvia. All this has a familiar look and smacks of the penny dreadfuls. It is the sort of thing which in the nineteenth century can only be pardoned on the plea of youth.

It is not to be wondered at that "Catiline" is in many respects a crude production. It is rather a matter of wonder that it contains so much which is informed with significance and is typical of the poet's maturer period. He must have felt during the composition of the drama the insufficiency of his education. He could scarcely aspire to a distinguished career in literature without the course in the classics which was the ornamental feather, where-with any crow-soul might parade undetected among the peacocks of culture.

It was in 1850, when he was twenty-two years old, that Ibsen entered Heltberg's "student factory" in Christiania, in order to prepare himself in the shortest possible time for the University. Among his schoolmates were Björnstjerne Björnson, the novelist Jonas Lie, and that extraordinary character, Aasmund Olafson Vinje, known in literature as *Dölen* (the Peasant). Björnson has left us a verse commemorative of this remarkable company:—

Long and lank, half-dozing in the outermost row,  
Sat Aasmund Olafson Vinje, and pondered, I trow.  
Over-strained and lean, of the colour of gypsum,  
Behind a beard, huge and coal-black, was seen Henrik  
Ibsen.

After an incredibly short preparation Ibsen presented himself for entrance to the University, and managed with difficulty to scrape through the examinations. In the meanwhile he had submitted "Cati-line" to the manager of the Christiania Theatre, and much to his chagrin had failed to secure its acceptance. A generous friend, a law student named Schulerud, volunteered, however, to publish the tragedy at his own expense, being sanguine that the general public would recognise its merit as cordially

as he did himself. But the public, like the theatrical manager, failed to respond. Only thirty copies of "Catiline" found *bona fide* purchasers, while the remainder of the edition was disposed of to a huckster who succeeded in securing for it a large circulation among a deeply appreciative public which eagerly devoured its contents, consisting of salted herring, sausage, and Limburger cheese.

Ibsen was during this period miserably poor. He had generally to dispense with dinner, but in order not to lose prestige with the people in whose house he lodged, he would always go out at dinner time, and on his return home drink after-dinner coffee. This ruse succeeded admirably, and no one, except his chum, Schulerud, whose scanty rations he shared, suspected how needy he was.

A second play, "The Warrior's Tomb," was accepted by the Christiania Theatre and was performed. It was of the usual romantic type, and full of reminiscences of Oehlenschläger. But for all that, or rather in consequence of its conventional colouring, it attracted some little attention and procured Ibsen a call as "theatre poet" and later stage manager of the newly established Norwegian Theatre in Bergen.



Thither he removed in November, 1851, and wrote another highly romantic play, entitled "St. John's Night" (1853), full of fairy lore and echoes of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream." Far more significant is the three-act musical tragedy "Norma, or a Politician's Love," which was never published in book-form. According to the account of it given by Henrik Jaeger, it scourged the spirit of compromise in Norwegian politics and exhibited in the germ some of the ideas which have blossomed in Ibsen's maturer satires.

A still further advance is marked by the tragedy "Mistress Inger of Oestraat" (1857), which presents an interesting and genuinely tragic problem. Mistress Inger was the wealthiest woman in Norway in the sixteenth century and a commanding historical figure in that period of national degradation. Ibsen has no doubt idealised her in making her the mouth-piece of a patriotic indignation which scarcely can be proved to have existed. However, whether historically correct or not, "Mistress Inger" is, dramatically considered, sufficiently effective. She has sworn on the bier of the murdered patriot Knut Alfsson to avenge his death; the peasants, groaning under the Danish

yoke, look to her to furnish them with arms and head the revolt against the oppressors; but her position as the mother-in-law of one Danish nobleman, Nils Lykke, and the widow of another, arouses suspicion as to the singleness of her motives. Before her marriage, she had been loved by the Swedish chancellor Sten Sture, and had borne him a son who had been brought up in his father's country. This son, whom, though unknown, she deeply loves, becomes her fate. There are two factions in Norway: one Danish-minded, which employs its power for extortion and oppression; and one Swedish-minded, which, through intrigues with Sten Sture, endeavours to effect an *entente-cordiale* with Sweden, and the proclamation of the latter's legitimate son as the king of Norway. But Mistress Inger, who dextrously plays under cover with both parties, conceives the idea of placing her own son by Sten Sture upon the throne. She becomes unfaithful to her patriotic purpose, and her constant fear of harming her son or placing obstacles in his way ties her hands and makes her act with cautious hesitation where prompt decision is needed. When finally her son appears upon the scene, she mistakes him for



the chancellor's legitimate son and has him murdered. A ring which she finds upon his body convinces her of the error, and she sinks down unconscious upon his coffin.

There is a great deal of tragic mouthing in this play, together with a gloomily romantic setting which has an unpleasant effect. The influence of Oehlenschläger is predominant; and the author's intentions are everywhere superior to his performance. The sub-intrigue of Nils Lykke with Mistress Inger's daughter Eline reminds us of Catiline's relation to Furia. This Danish nobleman has seduced Eline's sister Lucia, and Eline, though returning his love, is hungering for vengeance upon her sister's betrayer, whose identity with her lover she does not know. This typically melodramatic situation must have impressed itself strongly upon Ibsen's mind, since he makes such frequent use of it; and he scarcely seems to have dreamed how hackneyed it is. But what interfered with the success of "Mistress Inger" upon the stage was not its romantic conventionality, but rather the unrelieved and oppressive gloom which pervades the piece from beginning to end.

In Ibsen's next play, "The Feast at Solhaug" (1857), his romanticism culminates and produces a curious hybrid, half lyrical opera and half melodrama. It is written in verse, interspersed with songs, and is about as uncharacteristic of Ibsen, as we now know him, as "Lalla Rookh" would have been of Wordsworth, or "Don Juan" of Tennyson. His inspiration is this time drawn from the Norwegian folk-songs and heroic ballads, a fine collection of which had been published in 1853 by the Reverend M. B. Landstad. There were those, however, who maintained that he had borrowed largely from the Danish poet, Henrik Hertz, whose lurid tragedy, "Svend Dyring's House," had been published a few years before, and was rejoicing in exceptional popularity. Ibsen himself, in his preface to the second edition, repelled this insinuation; and in order to give the public a chance of judging, put Hertz's play on the boards a month after the performance of his own.

We have here, for the third time, the situation of the hero placed between two sisters who both love him; but in this instance there is no seduction. Gudmund Alfsson loves Signe, who returns

his love, and is adored with a guilty passion by her married sister Margit. The development of this problem is, however, more lyrical than dramatic; or rather it is alternately lyrical and dramatic, and gropes about in a sun-flushed mist of poetic enthusiasm.

"The Feast of Solhaug" was the first play of Ibsen which achieved success on the stage. It drew crowded houses, and all the ambitious scenes were greeted with prolonged applause. After six performances in Bergen it migrated to the larger stages of Christiania, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. "Olaf Liljekrans," which followed close on its heels, is in the nature of an "encore," though its germinal idea had existed for years in the author's mind, and had, even in a fragmentary form, been committed to writing. The material is borrowed partly from a Norwegian legend of the Ptarmigan of Justedal (the nickname of a girl who was the only survivor after the Black Death), and partly from the ballad of Olaf Liljekrans, who on his wedding day meets the elf-maidens in the forest and is slain by them, because he will not tread the dance and be unfaithful to his beloved. Ibsen, however, dispenses with the

elf-maidens and substitutes Alfchild, "the Ptarmigan," who is a child of nature, utterly ignorant of the usages of civilisation; and Olaf, instead of proving superior to her blandishments, succumbs and leaves his bride in the lurch. He is apparently bewitched, and forgets everything except the alluring loveliness of his unconventional companion. Being, however, recalled by his mother to a sense of his obligations, he deserts Alfchild, who, in revenge, sets fire to his house and burns it to the ground. She is seized, condemned to death, and about to be executed unless "some man of spotless fame shall step forward, declare her innocent, and proclaim himself willing to marry her."<sup>1</sup> Olaf, whose bride in the meanwhile has eloped with another man, offers himself as her champion, and Mistress Kirsten, his mother, having ascertained that "the Ptarmigan" is heir to the whole uninhabited valley, withdraws her objections and gives her blessing to their union.

"Olaf Liljekrans" is chiefly interesting as marking a period of transition in Ibsen's art. Life begins to intrude upon him, and the discrepancy between the

<sup>1</sup> As "Olaf Liljekrans" has never been published, the present account is taken from Jaeger's "Life," pp. 109, 110.

rotund magniloquence which tradition had prescribed for the stage and the accent of reality disturbs him, and makes him vacillate, according to his mood, between the one and the other. For all that, some years were yet to elapse before he definitely broke with the romantic tradition.

In 1857 Ibsen severed his connection with the Bergen Theatre, and returned to Christiania. This year became significant to Norwegian literature by the publication of Björnson's novelette, "*Synnöve Solbakken*," which may be said to have revealed the Norwegian nationality to itself. Here was, indeed, the national physiognomy, clear and distinct, though perhaps a trifle flattered. Henceforth Norway was no longer to walk in the leading-strings of Denmark. Björnson style was wholly new in literature; and its nervous strength and laconic pithiness were felt to be admirably expressive of the calm, rugged, and taciturn race which it undertook to describe.

At the very same time as Björnson, Ibsen was attracted to the old saga literature, in which the Norse nationality, eight or nine hundred years ago, had found its most monumental expression. Björnson had written, but not published, the remark-

able dramatic fragment, "Between the Battles," in which he had adopted the style of the sagas themselves, and attained a degree of concentration and condensed brevity in the dialogue which (as a Danish critic asserted) was but one step removed from pantomime. Ibsen struck simultaneously the same path in his drama, "The Warriors of Helgeland," which is a potpourri of themes taken from different sagas. The Völsunga furnishes the main plot, Egil's Saga one of the chief incidents, the Laxdöla an effective sub-motive, and the Njåla some striking bits of dialogue. It may be that my fondness for these sagas themselves prevents me from relishing the modification and remoulding to which Ibsen has subjected them. Hjördis is, to my mind, a flat failure. She has none of the nobility of soul, but all the ferocity, of her prototype Brynhild, in the Edda. She appeals to no modern sentiment; and the demonic grandeur of her speech, which might well befit a valkyrie, is simply repellent and unnatural in a mortal woman. Not a glimpse is there in Hjördis of the joyous and loving womanhood which is so beautifully revealed in the scene of the Edda, where Sigurd awakens Brynhild, and



they burst into a pæan of praise of the sun and moon and all earthly and heavenly things. Hjördis is fierce, gloomy, and terrible, from the beginning of the drama to its end, inciting men to discord by the diabolical cunning of her words, and revelling in bloodshed and murder. It is true enough that the sagas depict the women at that age as being often more ferocious than the men; but I fancy that it is the valkyrie, Brynhild, who haunts Ibsen's fancy and makes him desire to invest his earthly heroine with superhuman attributes which are incompatible with her character as a mere mortal. It is not to be denied, however, that she furnishes an admirable foil to the sweet, loving, and wholly womanly Dagny.

The plot is, with some essential modifications, that of the second half of the *Völsunga*, with many of its supernatural elements left out. Sigurd has loved and dishonoured Hjördis, and wedded Dagny; Hjördis avenges herself, and slays him, not by proxy, but with her own hand. A highly melodramatic scene concludes the drama. The diabolical rout, called "The Wild Chase," rushes through the air upon foaming black horses; and Egil, the son

of Hjördis, discovers his mother riding with a furious exultation amid the wild phantoms.

The drápa, or dirge of the chieftain Oernulf over his slain son, is very beautiful, but is obviously modelled on the *Sonartorek* ("The Loss of the Son") of "Egil's Saga."

I find myself unable to agree with those who maintain that "The Warriors of Helgeland" marks a definite breach, on Ibsen's part, with the romanticism of his youth. Though this drama is written in prose, it strikes many false notes and is by no means free from stagy grandiloquence. It appears to me that so far from desiring to humanise his heroes by dragging them down into reality, his endeavour was rather to exalt them with the tragic cothurnus. He wishes to hold up to the respectable, law-abiding pygmies of to-day these great types of lawless Norse heroism. There is not a single satirical hint in the play; but it is easy to see how the poet revels in the untamed and untamable grandeur of those ruthless, predatory men, whose sense of honour, strength of will, and calm contempt for death and danger, made them, at times, sublime.



In Christiania, Ibsen entered cordially into the work of redeeming the theatre from the Danish control, which was yet predominant. He was one of the founders of the so-called Norwegian Society (1859), whose object was to assert the Norse nationality and resist foreign influence in all branches of intellectual enterprise. Björnson was the president of this association, and Ibsen was made its vice-president. In fact, it did not appear in the least absurd to him then to form an association for the purpose of achieving some desirable end; nor is there any lack of evidence that he espoused the national cause with sincerity and zeal. To be sure, his "Warriors of Helgeland" had met with a cold reception from the Danish director of the Christiania Theatre, and though the play was not positively rejected, it was intimated that the financial condition of the theatre was not such as to justify the payment of a *honorarium*. But in spite of this alleged low ebb in the treasury the salaries of certain Danish actors were raised. Ibsen interpreted this as a deliberate affront to the national literature in his own person, and took the theatrical authorities

fiercely to task in the columns of the newspapers. Björnson, who shared his indignation at the Danish sway, supported him manfully; while a chorus of Danish sympathisers assaulted him with all the vehemence which is apt to characterise the journalistic feuds of Norwegians.

Ibsen had in the meanwhile married (1858) a daughter of the well-known authoress, Magdalene Thoresen, and had become the manager of the opposition stage, known as the Norwegian Theatre. He had also commenced the writing of a new saga drama, "The Pretenders," but left it for some years unfinished, while devoting himself to a modern theme which attracted him more. Of his first satire, "Love's Comedy" (1862), I have spoken at length in another chapter and shall therefore omit its consideration here. Fully as significant of Ibsen's intellectual growth are the two poems, "Terje Vigen" and "On the Mountain Plains" (1860), the latter of which is remarkable as showing the first distinct dawning of the ideas which we now identify with his name.

"The Pretenders" (1864) reflects the struggle between the two tendencies which were striving for

supremacy in the author's mind. There can be no doubt that his national zeal which had impelled him to the treatment of old Norse historical themes was already on the wane, while the problems of modern society were attracting him with increasing power. Hence the temporary abandonment of "The Pretenders" for the modern subject of "Love's Comedy." Secondly, his vision of life was changing. The romantic self-delusion which is common to youth was giving way to a clearer and maturer conception. What the experiences were which had disillusioned him, is left only to our conjecture ; but the fact remains that he was disillusioned. Under these circumstances it is obvious that the somewhat stilted poetic style which he had formerly employed could no longer satisfy him. He felt keenly in reading the inflated and bombastic saga tragedies of Oehlenschläger that there the accent of truth was wholly lacking ; and the perception grew upon him that the artificial movement of verse was hostile to the highest realistic effect. "The Pretenders" (like "The Feast of Solhaug") is therefore written in prose, with but few metrical passages.

Though the action of the drama belongs to the

thirteenth century, its psychological problem is essentially a modern one. It is the tragedy of doubt. Hakon's serene security and confidence in himself and his cause is sharply contrasted with Earl, later Duke, Skule's corrosive distrust, self-questioning, and indecision. The former, being a grandson of King Sverre, has been brought up by his partisans, the Birchlegs, in the faith that he is born to the throne; while the latter has only by the untimely death of his brother, King Inge, been placed in the position of a pretender. His ambition has been violently aroused by the dazzling prospect, and can no more be lulled; but of kingly mission and confidence in his right he has none. Psychologically he is the counterpart of Schiller's Wallenstein, who is also unable to lay the spectre which his own ambition has summoned. He has conjured a ghost that is stronger than himself. His desire for the throne becomes a half-demonic possession which impels him to deeds which are unworthy of him and incompatible with his idea of his own character. But, as in the case of Wallenstein, doubt paralyses his will in the moment when indecision is suicidal; and his very thirst for glory, his panting, insatiable desire

for the highest power, becomes a tragic doom which finally overwhelms him.

From the very first scene the antithesis between the two pretenders is emphasised. Hakon, being of illegitimate birth, but yet secure in his right (for the bar sinister did not in Norway exclude from the succession), has permitted his mother, Inga of Varteig, to submit to the ordeal of bearing glowing irons in order to prove that he is the son of King Hakon Sverreson. Now he is standing with a retinue of his followers outside the church awaiting, without a shadow of anxiety, the issue of the ordeal. Skule, with a train of ten partisans, stands on the opposite side of the square, distracted by contending hopes and fears, and tormented by forebodings. When the announcement is made that the ordeal has been successful, Skule perfidiously refuses to abide by the verdict, but demands a vote by the assembled warriors. When this, too, results in Hakon's favour, he accepts the compromise offered by the latter, gives him his daughter Margaret in marriage, but continues to intrigue against him, and to make every effort to undermine his power. In this nefarious policy he is encouraged by Bishop Nicholas, in

whose hands he becomes a willing, though unconscious, tool. This prelate is a wholly Mephistophelian character, and distinguishes himself but little from the traditional villain of melodrama. His wickedness is unrelieved by a single commendable trait. He is the style of malefactor that Victor Hugo (and romanticists the world over) revel in. He rejoices in evil-doing for its own sake; and even when dying, plots to arouse again the demon of civil war, so as to leave destruction and ruin behind him for ages to come. When he hears that Skule, in case he is convinced of the king's right to the throne, will abandon his own pretensions, he induces him, by a trick, to burn unread the letter containing the proof. But more diabolical even than this is his attempt to undermine the king's faith in himself; because this faith makes him strong, decisive in council, and prompt in action. It is he who, by his infernal insinuations and cunning mendacity, stimulates Skule's ambition whenever it seems on the point of flagging, and keeps the realm in perpetual ferment and turmoil. As a stage figure, it is not to be denied that he is impressive, but he draws too large drafts upon our credulity, and belongs essen-



tially to Ibsen's romantic period which came to a close with the publication of this work. When, for instance, Bishop Nicholas returns from hell, and as an evil ghost tries to induce Skule to kill the king's baby son, and his own grandson, we feel no cold shivers creeping down our back, but rather an impatience at the cheapness of the device. That ghost scene appears to me to be pitched in a wrong key, though Ibsen, in order to strike a deep and full chord, has made the phantom speak in rhymed couplets. The bishop is too loquacious, and has none of the august reticence and shuddering solemnity of the ghost in "Hamlet."

Altogether the most beautiful *motif* in the drama, next to the psychological antithesis between the two pretenders, is the theft by Duke Skule of Hakon's kingly thought. The former's conception is that the land must be divided and race opposed to race in order that the king, whose aid they all need, may be strong; while the latter labours to allay strife and sectional hate, and arouse a feeling of national solidarity, making the realm as a whole strong and united. This royal mission of Hakon, which he freely explains to his rival, Duke Skule appropriates;

but lacking any deeper comprehension of it, he fails to gain popularity by it, and is unable to devise the means for carrying it into effect. To him royalty means a golden crown, a purple cloak lined with ermine, and the right to sit upon a daïs, raised above all the rest. To Hakon it means arduous labour for the welfare of the land,—a divine mission with which he is charged, enlisting all his thoughts and faculties. Love, hate, and all personal emotions are subordinated to this sense of sacred responsibility. He sends away his mother, who is very dear to him, renounces the woman he loves, and marries Skule's daughter, all because his duty as king demands it. But in spite of all concessions, Skule remains irreconcilable, and finally raises the banner of rebellion and proclaims himself king. His illegitimate son Peter, who is very opportunely restored to him, makes his wavering faith in himself flare up in a sudden blaze. But it flickers again and nearly expires when Peter commits sacrilege in forcibly taking possession of St. Olaf's sarcophagus, in order to enable his father legally to take the coronation oath. Pressed on all hands by his enemies, Skule seeks refuge in the monastery of Elge-



saeter, whence he issues forth with his son, and both are cut down by the furious multitude that is clamouring for their blood.

As an acting drama, "The Pretenders" has always proved highly impressive; for it is written from beginning to end with the true dramatic instinct which concentrates the action, never allowing the interest to flag, and dispenses with all superfluous dialogue. Ibsen's familiarity with the stage, as manager and artistic director, had taught him the conditions of practical success, and the clear and orderly exposition of the dramatic problem in his later plays is largely due to this experience. But for all that he could acquire no confidence in himself. He was a Skule nature rather than a Hakon, and as his lyrics from this period show, the uncomfortable elf, doubt, was domesticated in the innermost nooks of his heart, and like a mouse behind the wainscoting, kept up its sleepless industry through the night. The scene in "The Pretender," between Skule and the Icelandic Scald Jatgeir, has been frequently quoted as applying to the author himself:—

KING SKULE.

To be a king, what gift is needful for me?

JATGEIR.

Not that of doubt ; thou wouldst not question thus.

KING SKULE.

What gift is needful ?

JATGEIR.

Lord, thou art king.

KING SKULE.

Art thou at all times sure thou art a poet ?

It is one of the curses of a small state that it lacks courage to recognise its great men. Ibsen had now demonstrated his right to the title of poet ; but fame and honour were slow in finding him out. Christiania was but a big, overgrown village, a hot-bed of slander and scandalous gossip, and its intellectual life was incredibly meagre. I was myself a resident of the Norwegian capital from 1864 to 1869, and well remember the social tone of those years. One hundred thousand village souls do not make a city. In Christiania the standards of judgment were mean, petty, provincial. What the Germans call *Brodneid*, i.e. professional envy, the desire to destroy every possible rival, was rampant in the upper as in the lower social strata. There was, indeed, no lack of superficial

culture; and some few highly refined families were to be found, among whom life had a certain gloss, and the manners were good enough to pass muster anywhere. But outside of University circles there were no intellectual interests; and even in University circles these had a wholly professional flavour and betrayed none of that charming hospitality of mind and generous glow of enthusiasm for all that is beautiful in the domain of thought, which makes life delightful in London, Paris, and Rome. Of course the Philistine is in the majority there as everywhere; but if you are so disposed, you may easily escape from him into the upper Olympian region, where breezes of thought healthfully agitate the atmosphere, and men and women meet on a higher plane than that of commercial or industrial rivalry. In Christiania there was during the years of Ibsen's residence no escape from the Philistine. He was ubiquitous and all-pervasive. He dominated society from top to bottom. He imposed his crude judgments upon all, and would tolerate no dissent.

The Norwegians are and have always been hot partisans, but they are by that very fact incapacitated for that cool, unbiassed impartiality which is required

for deciding questions of literary merit. Björnson had his partisans, who felt in duty bound to pull down Ibsen; and Ibsen, too, had his (though they were far less numerous), who pronounced Björnson stilted, affected, and too furiously national. There is no evidence at hand that either of the two poets encouraged this derogation of the other; but each was powerless to cool the zeal of his adherents.

It is not to be wondered at that Ibsen grew weary and heart-sick of this petty, narrow-minded, and unprofitable strife. That mere cockpit interest in literature as to which will beat is not stimulating to its object, but rather degrading. Ibsen, in the extreme discomfort of uncongenial surroundings, felt as if he were threatened with a complete torpidity of his imagination — a complete paralysis of all intellectual energy. In his desperate strait he applied to the government for a travelling stipend, which happily was granted. But the University faculty to which the matter was referred recommended that the amount be cut down to one-half of what the poet expected. Ibsen then appealed personally to Mr. Riddervold, the Minister of Education and Ecclesiastical Affairs, who, after having listened to his plea,

assumed the responsibility of granting him the entire sum.

No Norwegian, I fancy, who has never been away from home, can comprehend or sympathise with the keen distress of Ibsen during these last years of his sojourn in the land of his birth. That Norway, the most favoured land on the earth, should not be good enough for him or for anybody is a sentiment which is fiercely resented by his compatriots. There must be something radically wrong, they say, with the man who cannot find contentment among the many excellent and cultivated people who constitute what is called society in the Norse capital. There is, however, no arguing with these good folk; and I prefer to let Ibsen himself state his grievance against them. That remarkable poem entitled "The Power of Memory" refers obviously to these dark years, when he seemed to be "standing on the brink of his own grave," gazing shudderingly down into it.

Have you ever heard how a bear-tamer's pet  
Is taught to dance so he'll never forget?

Into a big caldron the bear is invited;  
And under the caldron a fire is lighted.

A wheezy hand-organ the sentiment voices :<sup>1</sup>

“Rejoice in life,” and the bear rejoices.

With anguish poor Bruin begins to prance ;  
He cannot stand still, and he therefore must dance.

Whenever he hears that tune at the gateway,  
A dancing-devil possesses him straightway.

Myself in that caldron once sat, o’er the fire ;  
The music played, and the heat was dire.

Then, more than my skin was burnt, I regret it ;  
But never, ah never, can I forget it !

Whene’er of those days an echo has found me,  
I instantly felt the hot caldron around me.

’Neath the roots of my nails pierce the keen stings of  
heat —

Then straight I must dance upon metric feet.

One naturally wonders what the experiences  
can have been which, even in remote retrospect,  
arouse so fierce a pain. Ibsen’s biographer,  
Mr. Henrik Jaeger, supplies no hint on this point.

<sup>1</sup> Literally: “In the meanwhile on the hand-organ he plays to  
Bruin: ‘Rejoice in life.’”



For poverty, however bitter, neglect, and hostile criticism are not sufficiently exceptional in the martyrlogy of poets' lives to account for such groans of acutest agony. There is no demand for sympathy in this or any of Ibsen's poetical confessions, but merely a cold and rather reticent admission of his suffering. They are *suspiria de profundis*, which are addressed to no one, but escape in the privacy of the poet's study, and by an apparent accident have found their way into print. The burden of all is sad, and they have an undertone of a chilly, cheerless discomfort which ripples with a cold shudder down one's back. Take for instance this, called "Afraid of the Light" (*Lysraed*), in which the autobiographical note is unmistakable:—

In the careless days of boyhood  
No fear would blanch my cheek,  
Until the sun was hidden  
Behind the mountain's peak.

But when the night its shadow  
Spread over glen and dale,  
Then ugly goblins would fright me  
From legend and fairy tale.



No sooner I closed my eyelids  
Than horrors thronged my dream ;  
Of all my brave daylight courage  
Remained never a gleam.

But now, in my mind how strangely  
The years have wrought a change !  
Now, valour flees when the morning  
Peeps o'er the mountain range.

Now 'tis the daylight's goblins,  
Life's brawl and wild unrest,  
Which throngs with shuddering visions  
Of horror my aching breast.

'Neath the hem of the veil of darkness  
I hide myself full fain —  
Then rises bold as an eagle  
My daring spirit again.

Then falcon-like cleaving the heavens,  
Both flame and sea I defy ;  
All anguish and woe forgetting,  
Till dawn awakes in the sky.

But if night's shelter be lacking,  
My soul cannot rise to its height ;  
If ever a deed I accomplish,  
It will be a deed of night.

On the second day of April, 1864, Ibsen turned his back on his native land, and except for a few brief summer visits, remained in voluntary exile for twenty-seven years. He seems, properly speaking, to have had no youth, no period of joyous illusion, when the world smiled to him in the dewy light of morning, and a miraculous charm invested every pretty girl who came in his way. In reading Jaeger's "Life," I get continually the impression that he was born old, and all his works tend to deepen this impression. It may have been due to the cramped circumstances of his childhood, that he was defrauded of the joy of life, which is every one's birth-right. He was too old, when he went abroad, to recover this lost youth—if, indeed, it is ever recoverable. He had acquired (even if he had not been born with) that serious gaze which sees but the death's-head at the banquet of life, and refuses to be deceived by the music, the mirth, and the flowers. He stands apart from the guests, sneering at their light-hearted levity and declining to join in their revels. The drop of gall in the goblet spoils for him the wine, and he puts it away contemptuously. Therefore he has always remained a stern and soli-

tary pilgrim, a looker-on, but not a partaker in the life of his age. Now we find him in Dresden, now in Munich, now again in Rome; but the chill discomfort of hired lodgings always clings about him, and never has he been sheltered by a roof which he could call his own. The "joy of life," the absence of which he keenly feels in his own existence, he found no more in the warm and laughing South than in the chill and serious North. But what he did gain by his exile was an outpost of observation from which he could contemplate objectively his past years and the society in which they had been spent. This larger vision of the world which he has acquired has enabled him to apply a new standard to the life which lay behind him, to discover its flaws, its aberrations, its problems.

It was in 1866, after two years' residence in Germany and Italy, that he sent home the dramatic poem "Brand," which was instantly recognised as a work of commanding interest. I think it is capable of demonstration, that it owed a large measure of its success to a misconception. Ninety-nine people out of every hundred who read the book had not the remotest comprehension of its philosophical

proposition, but yet derived from its perusal a vague edification. The vigorous denunciation of "halfness," pusillanimity, and sin, the frequent repetition of biblical phrases, the austere and uncompromising spirit that pervaded the poem, gave them the impression that it was a religious work, a tremendous penitential sermon, such as we all, being sinners before God, might stand in need of. That "Brand" is, in its whole tenor and tendency, anti-Christian, no one suspected; and if it had been suspected, the popularity of the book would have been imperilled. The Norwegian Storthing of 1866 certainly did not surmise it, or it would not have granted Ibsen "a poet's salary" of about \$600, for which three years earlier he had applied in vain. This, in connection with his copyright, made him practically independent, enabling him to live for his work alone, without troubling himself about the financial aspect of literary enterprise. The stoical sternness of his disposition and the frugality of his habits stood him in good stead, and not a single concession does he appear to have made to the public in his later dramas. The temptation "to tell lies for money," which Carlyle bewailed and manfully resisted, and

to escape which he fled to Craigenputtock, seems never to have come to Ibsen, after he had definitely abandoned the romantic drama, or if it came it was promptly dismissed.

The events of Ibsen's life are henceforth his books, and he seems, properly speaking, to have had no life apart from them. In 1867 he published the remarkable dramatic poem, "Peer Gynt," in 1869 the comedy "The League of Youth," and in 1871 a volume of "Poems," all of which abound in satirical allusions to his countrymen. In fact, "The League of Youth" was so offensive to Norwegian patriotism that it came near being hissed off the boards. During the first three performances at the Christiania Theatre disturbances occurred, and the friends and the enemies of the author nearly came to blows. Fisticuffs have been a favourite way of settling literary controversies in Norway since the time when Wergeland's drama, "The Campbells," precipitated a great æsthetic battle from which many withdrew with black eyes and bloody noses.

It had not been Ibsen's intention, when he left Norway in 1864, to take up his permanent residence abroad. The position of artistic director of the

Christiania Theatre was kept open for him for some time, in the expectation that he would return. But having once known the comfortable independence of life among strangers, he was in no haste to resume the yoke of responsibility to every cackling critic who was bent upon earning a little notoriety at his expense. That vantage ground of clear observation which he had gained in Rome was not to be lightly abandoned — Rome, which juts like a huge promontory into history and affords even the modern pilgrim an imposing survey of “the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof.” The work that matured in this atmosphere was, indeed, in the nature of a historic survey, not of the rise and fall of Greek, Latin, and Goth, but of the rise and fall of the successive empires of the spirit. “Emperor and Galilean” (1873) is even more than this. It is a prophecy of the spiritual evolution of man in the centuries to come. “It occupies,” says Mr. Jaeger, “an interesting position among Ibsen’s works. It is the last of his historical dramas, and stands, in its final form, with all its mysticism, midway between two such delineations of modern life as “The League of Youth” and “The Pillars of Society” (1877).



That Ibsen began about this time to grapple seriously with the problems of modern life is quite obvious; and he appears also to have dipped into the authors who represent the vanguard of modern thought. But, so far as I can judge from his writings, he can scarcely be said, in any sense, to have studied them. They furnished him hints, no doubt; stimulated, perhaps, his speculations, and aroused his antagonisms. Dr. Georg Brandes had, during the preceding decade, laboured in the face of obloquy and persecution to domesticate in Scandinavia the nineteenth century, through such representatives as Darwin, Stuart Mill, Auguste Comte, and Taine. It is very evident that Ibsen, as well as Björnson, profited by this propaganda, though they were, of course, not wholly dependent upon their native tongue for access to the world literature. Ibsen is highly proficient in German, and has a fair command of French and Italian. But of English he has not conquered even the rudiments.

The Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) had, in the meanwhile, not only made havoc in the cities of France, but it had exploded some resonant bombs, too, in the world of thought. God had been, as



usual, "on the side of the heaviest battalions." The Krupp guns had roared forth the harshest and somberest prose in the land of poetry and bright romance. Ibsen had absorbed, no doubt, in early years, the intense hostility to Germany and the predilection for France which have been prevalent in the Scandinavian countries since the first Sleswick-Holstein war. Sympathy with Denmark naturally assumed the form of hatred of her enemy. Bismarck and Von Moltke were therefore to Ibsen repellant figures, and he displays considerable one-sidedness in his references to them in the "Balloon-Letter to a Swedish Lady." This feeling must be taken into account in reading the following extract from a letter to Dr. Brandes, written during the progress of the war :—

"The events of the day largely occupy my thoughts," he writes. "The old illusory France has gone to pieces ; when the new actual Russia shall likewise go to pieces, we shall advance with a leap into the coming age. Ho ! How ideas will tumble about us ! And it will be high time, in sooth ! For up to date we have but been living on the crumbs from the revolutionary table of the last

century ; and that food has been chewed and re-chewed long enough. Our concepts call for new meanings and new interpretations. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are no more what they were in the days of the guillotine of blessed memory. This is just what the politicians will not understand ; and for that reason I hate them ! Men still call for special revolutions in politics, in externals. But all that sort of thing is trumpery. It is the human soul that must revolt."

This indicates sufficiently his point of view, which has been commented upon elsewhere. "Emperor and Galilean" was followed by "The Pillars of Society" (1877) and "A Doll's House" (1879), both of which have been made the subjects of separate chapters. The latter play, which has now gone the round of the civilised world, achieved an amazing popularity. It has been thrice translated into English, once into Dutch, French, Italian, Hungarian, Polish, and Russian, and I do not know how many times into German. It reached a hundred representations at two different Berlin theatres, and has held the boards for longer and shorter periods on nearly all the provincial stages. This extraordinary success is not

due primarily to the perfection of its technical construction, but to the fact that it deals in a vital manner with a vital subject.

"Ghosts" (1881) is scarcely inferior in interest. It does not, however, rejoice in the popularity of its predecessor. Its calm and pitiless audacity is apt to terrify those whom it would edify. No one will wonder that it was not well received. But, for all that, it made a profound impression, provoked passionate discussion. Even in England, where it was characterised by the *Daily Telegraph* as a "mass of vulgarity, egotism, coarseness, and absurdity," and "gross, almost putrid, indecorum," it found resonance in many earnest minds, which gave the poet credit for a nobler motive than the mere desire to shock and startle. Recently a remarkable novel has appeared, entitled "The Heavenly Twins" (1893), whose author, Madame Sarah Grand, boldly attacks the same theme, and with far less reticence enforces the lesson of "Ghosts." It is evident to me that this lady must have been stimulated by Ibsen, though there are passages in her book which seem also to hint at an acquaintance with Björnson's "A Glove" and "The Heritage of the Kurts." The

former of these (which is a play) has a situation exactly parallel to that of Evadne and Colonel Colcohoun, and propounds the identical postulate that women have the right to exact of men the same standard of purity that men exact of women.

As regards the two succeeding plays, "An Enemy of the People" (1882) and "The Wild Duck" (1884), we need not be surprised to hear that they aroused no immediate enthusiasm. Nor was the author disappointed at the comparative absence of any ardent response. It was hardly to be expected that the multitude should relish the derision which Ibsen so unsparingly heaps upon it. For all that, these plays, like their predecessors, slowly won their way and made their impression, which, instead of being obliterated by the next literary sensation, is continually deepening.

There is to me something almost imposing in Ibsen's imperturbable serenity and his utter renunciation of the weak desire to please or flatter his public. At a time when nine-tenths of the books published have the air of having been written to order, it is refreshing to encounter works which, resting upon a broad understructure, are but the

visible summits of fog-enshrouded mountains of thought. I have this feeling in reading "Rosmersholm" (1886), and in a still higher degree in "The Lady from the Sea" (1888), which, in spite of its somewhat obscure symbolism, is full of poetry and rises to lofty speculative heights. It forms, indeed, an indispensable supplement to the rebellious individualism of "A Doll's House" and "Ghosts," and marks psychologically an important stage in the author's development.

Ibsen's fame had, during the last decades, been steadily increasing, and was long since established in Germany, Austria, and Holland. Now France, too, began to occupy itself with his work; M. Prozor brought out a series of excellent translations; the theatres, undismayed by failures, kept returning to him; and Edouard Rod and that prince of critics, Jules Lemaitre, furnished most luminous interpretations of his plays to the public journals. In fact, M. Lemaitre, whose wit and vivacity of style are more than rivalled by his philosophic insight, devotes two chapters to him in his delightful series, "Impressions de Théâtre,"<sup>1</sup> and, as he informs us,

<sup>1</sup> *Cinquième and Sixième Série*, 1891 and 1892.

preceded the performance of "Hedda Gabler" at the *Vaudevilles* with a lecture. In fact, when the latter play appeared (1890), Ibsen had come to be recognised in every civilised country as a potent force in the world of thought. An authorised English translation of his works by William and Charles Archer, clear, faithful, and painstaking, is not as yet complete ("Love's Comedy" and "Poems" being untranslated);<sup>1</sup> but the mere fact that there is a considerable demand for it on both sides of the ocean is sufficiently gratifying to the lover of Ibsen, to reconcile him to the narrowness and unintelligence of the great majority of reviews in English and American journals.

There is on the fly-leaf of Ibsen's latest play, "The Master Builder"<sup>2</sup> (1892), an unobtrusive little note which proclaims like a bugle blast the completeness of its author's triumph.

*"Almost simultaneously, with the present original edition," we read, "authorised English, French, and German translations will appear. Somewhat later a Russian, a Dutch, an Hungarian, a Bohemian, and a Polish translation will follow."*

<sup>1</sup> August, 1893.

<sup>2</sup> The title of the original is "Master Builder Solness."



Since Victor Hugo's "Les Miserables" was published simultaneously in nine languages, I doubt if any such tribute has been paid to a man of letters as is implied in this eagerness to read him on the part of the thinking minority of eleven nations.<sup>1</sup>

In 1891 Ibsen returned to his native land, and has since then been living in Christiania, where he pursues his solitary ways with the same independence as in Munich, Dresden, and Rome. He is now the pride of the people which he has scourged; for much is forgiven to him who has added a fresh leaf to the nation's laurels.

<sup>1</sup> I naturally include Norwegians, as well as Danes and Swedes, who do not require translations.





## THE COMEDY OF LOVE.

"THE COMEDY OF LOVE" is one of the few remaining plays of Ibsen which have not yet been translated into English. It was the first of his distinctly satirical works, and was published in 1862, when he was thirty-four years old. The Norwegian press received it with a howl of indignant protest; and its author was denounced as a ruthless iconoclast "devoid of ideality." A high authority at the University of Christiania declared, when Ibsen applied for a stipend, that the person who had written "Love's Comedy" deserved a stick rather than a stipend. The play was not only "immoral," and "unpoetical, as must be every view which is unable to reconcile the real to the ideal," but it was pronounced to be "provincial" and "a pitiful product of literary trifling."

This chorus of censure, though it does not rival in vehemence and unreason the extracts from the

London journals on the production of "Ghosts" (collected by Mr. Bernard Shaw in his "Quintessence of Ibsenism"), is yet significant as sounding the first note of alarm in the Philistine camp at Ibsen's attacks upon its "ideals." "The Comedy of Love" is indeed an attack upon the institution of marriage; but, for all that, it is not immoral. It does not, even by inference, recommend license; but as his biographer, Henrik Jaeger happily puts it, "scourges love in love's own name," and holds up an ideal which, by contrast, makes the reality, as we know and see it, repulsive.

The situation is briefly this: Mrs. Halm, a lady of good family, has two daughters, Anna and Svanhild. The former engages herself to a theological student named Lind, and the latter is loved by a gifted young poet named Falk. Lind, who had, or fancied he had, a heroic strain in him, had aspired to lead a life of noble renunciation, and, to prove the lofty sincerity of his faith, had resolved to go as a missionary to preach the gospel to the Norwegian emigrants on the American prairies. But now, when he is betrothed, all the cousins and aunts and the whole swarm of female busy-bodies rush in upon him and insist that

as an engaged man he has obligations to his *fiancée* and to society; he has no right to talk of sacrifice and renunciation, which would now also include her. Lind, it must be admitted, is not averse to entertain this view; and after a mere sham resistance, he surrenders all thought of heroism, and applies for a place as teacher in a girls' school.

In the case of the department clerk, Styver, and Miss Skjære, we have the same story, though with modifications. These two have engaged themselves, many years ago, when they were young and romantic; but Mr. Styver has never been able to scrape together enough to marry on. In the meanwhile they have grown middle-aged and practical; all the bloom of youthful sentiment has been rubbed off; every vestige of poetry has vanished from their relation; and the constant theme of their thought and their speech is money — money — money. They need a certain sum in order to enable them to go to house-keeping in a respectable manner; and now they are only concerned about loans, interest, and chattel mortgages.

A third instance, and a glaring one, of this translation of the poetry of love into the prose of matri-

mony, is the Reverend Mr. Straamand and his wife Maren. The pastor had in his youth been something of a genius, — had played the guitar, composed music, and published “Seven Sonnets to my Maren.” He had even had the courage to marry this lady (who was “the daughter of a lumber firm”) without the consent of her parents, and had bravely set up housekeeping in a garret, with supreme disregard of the world’s opinion. Presently, however, Mr. Straamand had procured a country living and a parsonage. He had grown comparatively prosperous, and in the course of time had become the father of twelve children, “with a near prospect of the thirteenth.” Through the door of wedlock he and his Maren had plunged into a slough of direst prose, having lost all individual life and surrendered all higher aspirations in the mere effort to provide for their numerous offspring. Like many of the lower animals who have scarcely any conscious life, — who are born, breed, and die, — they have become mere mechanical instruments in the hands of Fate for the propagation of their species.

It is in order to escape this lot, or anything resembling it, that Falk and Svanhild, after having

tasted the pure bliss of love's avowal, resolve to separate, rather than face the certainty of being gradually swamped and smothered in the slowly torturing and disillusionising trivialities of matrimony. For who manages, amid the cries of teething children, the monthly rain of bills and duns from butcher and baker and candlestick-maker, to preserve his equanimity of temper, his spiritual freedom, his fidelity to his loftiest purpose? How can a man do the greatest that is in him to do when he is obliged to grind out so many hundreds or so many thousands at the demand of his wife, who is perhaps accustomed to a higher style of living than he, and would rather give up her life than sacrifice an inch of her social position? How can she help losing the wild ideal charm which once invested her lovely face, when she becomes to him the incorporation of a cruel necessity which forces his nose to the grindstone—compels him to do, not what his soul impels him to do, but what is for the moment most profitable, most marketable, and to himself, perhaps, most contemptible? How can he continue to love and cherish her with the old ardour, when he feels that she is virtually re-

sponsible for this calamity which makes him in his own eyes (whatever he may be to the world) a despicable failure?

The other side of this question, which will occur to every reader, is not here worth presenting. Ibsen's lovers are by no means blind to it, but, like the author himself, they are more deeply impressed, with the disadvantages than with the advantages of the married state. The representative of life's prose, the wholesale merchant Guldstad, is, curiously enough, the most estimable and sympathetic character in the whole play, and it is into his mouth that Ibsen puts the defence of matrimony — not the love-match, but the *mariage de convenance* :—

Ah no, there yet is something which is better.  
 It is the tranquil, gentle, cordial flow  
 Of warm esteem, which must its object honour,  
 As much as rapture in a blissful trance.  
 It is the feeling of delight in duty,  
 The joy of care, the blessed peace of home,  
 Of two wills fondly yielding to each other,  
 Of watchful outlook, lest no stone should hurt  
 Her foot, the dear one's, where in life she treads.  
 It is the gentle hand which heals all wounds,  
 The virile force which bears on willing shoulders,



The peace of mind extending through the years ;  
The steady arm which props and lifts securely ;—  
That, Svanhild, is the contribution I can offer  
Toward the building of your happiness.

Falk, with his uncertain temper, his ecstasies and despairs, and the excessive sensitiveness peculiar to poets, is fully conscious that he can offer nothing equivalent to this secure comfort, peaceful equanimity, and tender protection. But it is not this consciousness which primarily makes him resolve to renounce his beloved ; it is the fear that his love, which now is glorious in its perfect bloom, will and must, like all mortal things, fade and perish under the slow tooth of time. It will endure long, he says, but he cannot in sincerity promise that it will last forever. Svanhild, considering the matter in this view, exclaims :—

Oh, “long,” “long,” poor miserable word !  
To “long” endure, oh, what is that to love ?  
It is its doom,—the mildew on the seed.  
For “love must count upon eternal life.”  
That song is silenced now ; some day instead  
It shall run thus : ‘I loved thee, love, last year,’  
Nay, never thus shall wane our day of bliss,  
Perish with weeping sunset in the west ;

Let now our sun be quenched, a fair mirage,  
At its high noon, while gloriously it shines.

FALK (*frightened*).

What wilt thou, Svanhild?

SVANHILD.

We are spring's bright children ;  
Behind it there shall come no dreary autumn,  
When in thy breast the bird of song is silent,  
And never yearneth thither whence he came.  
Behind it never shall the wintry pall  
Enshroud the chill white corpse of all thy dreams.  
Our love, the glad, all-conquering, victorious,  
No blight shall touch, no age shall wither.  
Die shall it, as it lived, rich, young, and strong.

FALK (*in an agony of grief*).

And far from thee — what worth has life to me?

SVANHILD.

What were it near to me, when love were dead?

FALK.

A home !

SVANHILD.

Where strove the elf of bliss with death?

\*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*   \*

FALK (*with strong resolution*).

Throw the ring away !

SVANHILD (*with enthusiasm*).

Thou wishest it?

FALK.

Throw it away! Full well I understand thee.  
In this way only, Svanhild, do I win thee!  
For as the grave doth lead to life's bright dawn,  
Thus love is consecrated unto life,  
When, purged of yearning and of wild desire,  
It flees delivered to the spirit home  
Of memory.

\* \* \* \* \*

SVANHILD

(*joyously, as she throws the ring far out into the fjord*).

Now I have lost thee for this nether life,  
Now I have won thee for eternity!

It would be a mistake, I fancy, to interpret this as an act of religious asceticism. Ibsen's conception of renunciation is that it steels and braces the personality, and brings out, as by a fiery test, whatever latent strength and virtue there may be in it. The bitter but salubrious cup of woe which he has himself drained to the dregs he puts to the lips of every soul that is virile enough to endure the wholesome discipline of sorrow. Slothful ease and the joy of

possession cause in time satiety and a weary discontent ; then, when love begins to wane, and even passion to subside, comes the necessity to feign and to lie, first to the once-beloved, then to ourselves, and finally, when the ideal is hopelessly shattered, we find a shabby consolation in the reflection that our lot is not exceptional—that, in fact, we cannot expect perfection in this world, but must put up with things as they are. It is to save his lovers from this fate that Ibsen makes them voluntarily renounce each other. It is with a dim prevision of this danger that Falk, in the first act, exclaims :—

With blight of blindness smite mine eyes' bright mirror ;  
I'll sing the glory of the radiant skies.  
Send me but anguish, crushing, torturing,  
For but a month, — a vast gigantic sorrow, —  
And I'll sing the jubilant joy of life.

## BRAND.

IT was the dramatic poem "Brand," published in 1866, which made Ibsen a power in Scandinavian literature. He had during the years immediately preceding, written historical dramas for the stage, and had reaped a fair degree of success. But it was "Brand" which revealed the fact that here was a new and bold spirit, capable of penetrating to the deeper depths of existence.

The problem in "Brand" is one that has universal application — and it recurs, in one shape or another, more or less emphatically, in all Ibsen's later writings. It is not exactly Hamlet's categorical proposition "to be or not to be," but it is the question of being wholly and completely that which you are; and being guided wholly and completely by a definite norm and principle of conduct. Ibsen's constant accusation against the race is that it is mean and pusillanimous; that it is neither wholly good nor

wholly bad ; but rather good or rather bad. We yield a sort of half-hearted allegiance to a code of morality which we dare not wholly disregard ; nor do we have the strength of character to incorporate it unflinchingly in all our actions. We choose the middle way, — the golden mean, — showing outwardly respect for what we inwardly neglect and violate ; or we compromise with God at twenty or thirty or fifty per cent, avoiding great and outrageous sins, but indulging with a soothed conscience in the smaller. We comfort ourselves with the despicable reflection that we are, on the whole, better than the average of men ; and that God cannot in fairness demand more of us. Otherwise He would be under the necessity of admitting that His creation was a failure.

Now, to Ibsen this spirit of compromise — this *halfness*, as he calls it — is contemptible beyond expression. It constitutes the gravamen of all his charges. The only curious circumstance is that (to my knowledge) he nowhere states that it is a direct consequence and inevitable concomitant of modern democracy. I do not for a moment question that he sees the connection quite plainly ; and his aversion

for democracy is, therefore, from his point of view, perfectly rational.

Brand, the hero of Ibsen's dramatic poem, is a clergyman who accepts the ideal demand of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, and determines to live in absolute accordance with it. He is resolved to be wholly and absolutely true to the call which he believes to be from God. The opening scene places the situation vividly before the reader. Brand is represented as being on his way to his native village, which lies on the other side of the mountain. The Peasant and his Son have been engaged as his guides.

#### ACT FIRST.

*(Long stretches of snow on the mountain plains. Dense and heavy fog; rain and dusk.)*

BRAND *(dressed in black, carrying a staff and knapsack, crawling westward)*.

A PEASANT and his half-grown SON *(who accompany him, some distance behind)*.

*(The Peasant shouts to Brand.)*

PEASANT.

Hallo there, stranger, not so fast !

Where are you ?



BRAND.

Here !

PEASANT.

In snow and blast  
You'll go astray. The fog's so dense,  
I scarce can see a staff's length hence.

SON.

And here are cracks !

PEASANT.

Yes, deep crevasses !

BRAND.

And every trace of path we've lost.

PEASANT (*yells*).

In God's name, stop ! No man here passes ;  
Frail is the ice from recent frost.

BRAND.

I hear a cataract's dull thunder !

PEASANT.

A brook has hollowed out its bed !  
Here is a chasm, dark and dread.  
It'll swallow us and whirl us under !

BRAND.

I must go onward, as I told you.

PEASANT.

No human power can here uphold you.  
Frail is the ice — thin as a sheet !  
Stay, death is yawning at your feet.

BRAND.

A great man sent me. On I plod.

PEASANT.

What is his name?

BRAND.

His name is God.

PEASANT.

And what are you?

BRAND.

I am a priest.

PEASANT.

Well, that may be, but I, at least,  
Do know, that if you were a dean,  
Or bishop, at the dawn's first sheen,  
Stark you will lie, with eyes grown dim,  
If you dare tread the glacier's rim.

*(Approaches warily ; with persuasion.)*

Now listen, priest, if e'er so wise,  
No man can do what is too hard.  
Turn back. Now heed what I advise !  
One life you have ; if lost or marred  
It is, then pray what have you left ?  
'Tis seven miles to nearest hut ;  
So thick the fog crawls from the cleft  
That with a knife it could be cut.

BRAND.

The less the risk, if dense the fog,  
That jack-o-lanterns make us stray.

PEASANT.

But round about are tarn and bog,  
And ugly customers are they.

BRAND.

We'll walk across.

PEASANT.

On water walk !  
You do that first, and I'll believe it.

BRAND.

If faith be perfect, naught can baulk.  
One showed, at least, He could achieve it.

PEASANT.

In ancient times, sir, happened that ;  
Now He would perish like a rat.

BRAND (*walks on*).

Farewell !

PEASANT.

You'll lose your life !

BRAND.

If God has need that I shall die,  
Then welcome cataract, chasm, knife !

PEASANT (*to his son*).

Nay, he is madder than a loon.

SON (*half-weeping*).

Oh, let us turn, the lowering sky  
Betokens storm, and that right soon.

This is sufficient to indicate the style of the poem, which is uncompromisingly harsh, stern, and realistic, but full of a daring both in thought and language, which is extremely impressive. The peasant and his son leave Brand, who, with death before his eyes, pursues his journey alone. Presently the threatening clouds clear away, and the clergyman safely begins his descent on the other side of the mountain. Here, as the morning breaks, he meets Einar, a young artist, and Agnes, his betrothed, who come dancing, hand in hand, over the mountain plain, finding life all laughter and roses. They chase each

other, like two children, find infinite amusement in everything, and in their heedless mirth are just about to dance out over the precipice, when Brand calls to them. These two represent the thoughtless, happy-go-lucky gayety of youth, which takes life easily, as a merry game, without troubling itself about its serious problems. Brand, recognising in the artist a former schoolmate, enters into conversation with him, making him unfold his plans for the future, and satirises keenly his shallow levity and incapacity for serious thought and action. The stern judgment here pronounced upon the race (primarily the Scandinavian, but no less applicable to all other civilised peoples) is full of trenchant sayings, and sounds the key-note of Ibsen's philosophy : —

That which thou art, be it completely ;  
 Not only piecemeal and discreetly.  
 Heroic, bright stands the bacchante —  
 The sot is but a dilettante.  
 Silenus, as a thought, is fine ;  
 Not so the toper, drunk with wine.  
 Now in this country, try the feat  
 To question every man you meet,  
 And, you'll find in word and action,  
 He is of everything a fraction.

On holidays a little serious ;  
 A little true ; a bit imperious,  
 As were his fathers ; somewhat clamorous  
 And towards eve a trifle amorous.  
 Enthusiast a little bit  
 About "the little rock-bound nation,"  
 When song is heard, as does befit,  
 On each convivial occasion.

\* \* \* \* \*

But, as I said, of each a little ;  
 His faults are dwarfed, his virtues brittle ;  
 In great and small, in good and bad,  
 He is a fraction ; and it's sad,  
 Each fraction's part, the more you dole,  
 Will kill and waste the fraction's "whole."

This is indeed a formidable indictment ; but no one will deny that it applies to modern man in general rather than to any particular nation. The conditions of modern life are peculiarly favourable to the production of these fractional men ; and if the greatest good of the greatest number be the aim and test of civilisation, we ought to rejoice that such is the fact rather than deplore it. Nature is not lavish of heroes ; and the men born with that splendour of mental equipment which constitutes a potentiality of greatness, are at all times in a vanishing proportion

to those who are but moderately endowed, who count but numerically — who are but one more and very little else. To require heroic sentiment or action of this latter class is a manifest absurdity. And it is this which Ibsen in “Brand” is continually doing. The very demand itself is to nine-tenths of humanity incomprehensible; and the man who propounds it is judged little better than a lunatic. But for all that, there is, to my mind, something wholesome and morally purifying in this stern spirit holding up to a paltry and pusillanimous world a mirror of an impossible perfection.

But to return to the plot. The power and dignity of Brand’s personality make a deep impression upon Agnes, who cannot help mentally contrasting him with her *fiancé*, to the latter’s disadvantage.

Brand continues his descent into the valley, and meets the wild and reckless gypsy girl, Gerd, who is engaged in throwing stones at a hawk. Gerd is an utterly untutored pagan creature, who follows nature’s promptings without a moment’s reflection. She has a certain affinity with the sky, the sea, and the mountains in their fiercest and wildest aspects; and as she is wholly herself, Ibsen evidently intends



her for a foil to the tame and cautious every-day creatures which he later introduces. She is nobler to him in her mad and savage unrestraint than is the Sheriff, for instance, with his paltry prudence and his lax and slipshod notions of right and wrong. She seems to represent the old paganism, the powers of darkness against which, as a minister of Christ, Brand is to wage war ; but even in this capacity she has the dignity of her wild completeness which knows no hesitation between opposing standards of conduct.

The second act opens impressively with a public distribution of provisions to the famished peasants. This gloomy valley, pressed in the cold embrace of cloud-capped mountains, is subject to frequent failure of the crops, and famine is then the result. The greed, the barbaric passions, which hunger arouses, and the dark, squalid misery are depicted with terrible vividness. Einar, touched by the distress of the people, has emptied his pocket-book ; and the Sheriff, who is checking off the names in his ledger, as the recipients of the gifts come forward, calls upon Brand to make his contribution. Brand, however, refuses. He regards the famine as a judgment

of God, intended to rouse the people from their spiritual apathy. With this stern discipline he will not interfere. The Sheriff, irritated by his harsh words, incites the peasants to attack him. Brand is in danger of being mobbed. But at this point a terrific storm, which has long been threatening, breaks over the fiord ; and a woman who has just landed startles them by the horrors which she relates. She wants a priest to shrive her dying husband, who, in a savage frenzy induced by hunger, has killed his child and then attempted to take his own life. Brand, though all the people declare that it is sure death to attempt to cross the fiord in such a tempest, steps into the boat and asks the woman to accompany him. But her heart fails her ; she refuses. Brand then calls upon any man present to hold the tiller, while he manages the sail. But no man will risk his life on such an errand. Then at last, on his repeating the challenge, the young girl Agnes steps forward and takes her seat in the boat. Her lover implores her to abandon so dangerous an enterprise, but she scorns his counsel. They put off from shore, and amid the breathless sympathy of the crowd finally reach their destination.

In the next scene a deputation of peasants comes to Brand, urging him to become their minister. Since famine, dearth, and poverty have brought them low, there has been a dearth of clergy, too, in the parish. The deed which Brand has accomplished before their eyes has thrilled them and convinced them that he is the man they need. He will not refuse them spiritual comfort because of their poverty. This is the hour of sorest trial to the heroic soul. He always has fancied himself speaking words of thunder that shall resound through the world, rousing thousands to repentance. Like a giant he will stand in the great arena, unfolding in all men's sight the powers which he feels that God has given him. His work is to be for the glory of God, and for the benefit of his fellow-men. But now he recognises for the first time that there is a subtle vanity in this noblest purpose of his life; and he trembles lest the spokesman of the peasants shall convince him that it is his duty to abandon it,—for that would be to him like tearing his heart out of his breast. He shudders at the thought of that martyrdom of obscurity to which he would be condemned in this dark and remote little valley, whence no word

spoken and no deed done will ever reach beyond the ridge of the all-enclosing mountains. At the same time he recognises that to the strong man this sacrifice (because it would be the greatest of all) is the fiery test of his sincerity. But he feels himself unequal to it, and the men depart sorrowfully.

Agnes, who still clings to him, fascinated by his lofty strength, brings a dawning clearness into his troubled mind; and by her promise to share his life with him, wherever and whatever it be, facilitates, perhaps, the resolution which, however, surely would have ripened even without the sunshine of her presence.

While they are yet talking, Brand's mother, a hard and avaricious old woman, who has spent all her life in sordid saving and the accumulation of wealth, comes hobbling up over the hills, seeking her son. Besides her passion of avarice, she has one predominant sentiment, very common among the peasants of Norway — pride of race. Brand is her only child, and she has scraped together, by hook and by crook, her hard-earned pelf, in order that he may become rich, and by his wealth sustain the dignity of the family. Like a blow, therefore, his declaration that he cares

nothing for her riches stuns her; he may indeed scatter the inherited gold to all the winds of heaven. He tries vainly to convince her of her vanity and the sordidness of her ambition, and repeats in effect the demand of Christ to the rich young man: "Go, sell all that thou hast and give to the poor."

The old woman, however, is not to be moved. She is distressed, but she clings with her whole soul to the only value which life has taught her to respect. And in the end she declares her conviction that God will not demand so much of her. He will be more merciful to her than is her son.

The painful discussion tends to reinforce the conviction which is irresistibly taking possession of Brand — that here lies his duty, here is his work.

Ah, my festal song is sung ;  
 And my winged horse has thrown me :  
 But a greater goal is shown me  
 Than a flashing falchion swung ;  
*Daily drudgery, duty's toil,*  
*Consecrate on native soil.*

\* \* \* \* \*

For no boastful deed of might  
 Lifts the race unto the light.  
 Not the arousing of rich powers

Raises up the soul that cowers.  
*'Tis on the will that all depends ;*  
The will enthralls or freedom sends—  
The will entire—in small and great,  
In trifling things and deeds of weight.

The next scene, in which Einar comes and demands back his beloved, may be passed over lightly. Brand gives her the choice, and she chooses gloom, privation, and sorrow with the strong man rather than sunshine and thoughtless enjoyment with the weak one.

The third act represents the parsonage plastered like a swallow's nest up under the mountain wall. Three years have elapsed. Agnes is Brand's wife, and a son, Alf, has been born to them. A messenger arrives from Brand's mother, asking him to come and comfort her in her dying hour ; but on being informed that she is but willing to give up half her property, as a condition of receiving the sacrament, he refuses to go. It is not hardness of heart or needless cruelty which prompts his refusal. The agony which he endures is more than indicated in his exclamation to the messenger :—

The half ? the half ? nay, all was meant !



After a while a second messenger arrives and offers nine-tenths. But Brand remains immovable. You cannot bargain with God. Give Him your whole heart, without reserve, or give Him nothing. This is Brand's ever-repeated demand. His mother dies, but he is not shaken in his conviction that he has been right in withholding from her the sacrament.

In the next scene the worldly wise and slippery Sheriff appears, and after some polite preliminaries urges Brand to leave the parish. All this religious awakening appears to him unwholesome, because it arouses a spirit of exaltation and "other-worldliness" which is alien to him and with which he does not know how to deal. Heroic deeds, he says, were well enough in the olden time, but nowadays that sort of thing is out of place. "The war of God" which Brand preaches appears to him the wildest absurdity. "God's war and the cultivation of potatoes you wish to combine!" he exclaims, and Brand boldly answers, "Yes."

Amid all his stern and uncompromising warfare, Brand has an unfailing source of happiness in his wife and child, whom he loves with all the ardour of his strong soul. A secret anxiety, however, preys



upon Agnes' mind. She sits for hours at the cradle watching her sleeping boy and fancying that he does not thrive as he should. A visit from the doctor confirms her apprehension. The child is death-doomed unless he be removed to a milder climate. Here the breath of the glacier and the long, sunless winter will soon kill him. The mortal agony which Brand now undergoes is most touchingly expressed. His first impulse is to flee, and he bids Agnes wrap up the child in its cloak and prepare for the journey. But then the terrible thought occurs to him that he who is so stern to others is instantly ready to forsake his work when that which is dearest to him is at stake. What is to become of the people if he abandons them? The vigorous spiritual life which now is being kindled round about him, what will become of it if he himself proves unfaithful? The victory of the powers of darkness which then will result, is foreshadowed in the interview with the gypsy girl Gerd, who wildly exults in the parson's expected flight. Now Brand sees his duty clearly, and with a breaking heart bids Agnes re-enter the house.

In the opening of the fourth act the child is dead,

and the mother sits disconsolately at the window; on Christmas Eve, staring out into the churchyard, shuddering at the thought which she cannot shake off, that her little boy must be cold in the dark, frozen ground. She opens the shutter and puts a candle where it may throw its friendly light out upon the lonely little grave. Brand, returning from a journey, finds her thus nursing her sorrow; and rebukes with affectionate sternness her idolatrous worship of her dead boy. God demands her undivided allegiance, and the sacrifice which she has made would be unavailing if she cannot (in the knowledge that little Alf lives in heaven) break the bonds of her earth-bound sorrow. To all this Agnes answers most touchingly:—

God as thou hast bade me know Him  
Is a mighty king or chief;  
How can I dare go unto Him  
With my little mother grief.

Believing that sternness is the truest mercy, he pronounces unflinchingly the words which seem to tear open her bleeding wound—though they hurt him scarcely less than they do her. Then he bids her close the shutters and remove the candle. But

her mind with a pathetic persistence revolves about this same idea that the child is cold : —

Let me mourn, oh, let me weep !  
When I've wept, then bid me climb  
Duty's path so rough and steep.  
Brand, last night, at midnight's time,  
Came my child up to my bed ;  
And his cheeks with health were red.  
In his little shirt I saw him  
As with toddling steps he came,  
And I yearned to touch him — draw him  
To my breast. He called my name,  
As if begging me to take him  
In my bed and warm to make him,  
For I saw it — do not scold !

BRAND.

Agnes !

AGNES.

Brand, my child was cold !

In the next scene the Sheriff, recognising Brand's popularity, comes to propose a compromise with him, so that they may work together for common ends ; but Brand repulses him and does not disguise his contempt for his cheap and undignified shilly-shallying. Agnes, in the meanwhile, being deprived

of the consolation of worshipping the grave, seeks a refuge for her sore and yearning heart in the mementoes of the child, which are still left to her. She pulls out the drawers in which his toys and clothes are kept, and in a tender soliloquy revives each blissful memory of how he looked and what he did:—

Here's the veil and here's the cloak —

At his christening they were new —

This his dress, with pointed yoke !

*(Holds it up, gazes at it, and laughs.)*

Oh, my God, how sweet ! what joy !

Lovely was my little boy,

As he sat there in the pew !

Here's the shawl, and in this packet

Are his dress and little jacket

I put on him, when preparing

First to take him for an airing.

Then too long it was — I knew it —

But my boy quite soon outgrew it.

That I'll hang up on these pegs,

Mittens, socks — how sweet his legs !

And his hood I here will fold,

Which he got, lest he be cold.

It is wadded, new and clean,

And the silk has kept its sheen.

Ah, there lies his travelling-cloak

In which I wrapped him tightly,  
That he journey warmly, lightly,  
On that day — my heart it broke,  
When aside I had to lay it.

BRAND (*wrings his hands in anguish and says :*)

Oh, my God, I cannot slay it —  
Her last idol ! Spare me, spare me !  
Send another !

At this moment a squalid gypsy beggar woman enters with a half-naked child ; and Brand sees in this an answer from God, enforcing the painful duty. He now demands of Agnes that she shall give all her tear-drenched treasures to this repulsive wandering beggar. After a heart-rending scene she yields ; and the last link that bound her to the dust is broken. In a brief ecstasy of celestial joy she thanks her husband for his sternness which has helped her win the last and hardest victory ; but she adds significantly :—

Hast forgot the words so wise :  
He who sees Jehovah dies ?

Then the reaction follows, in which she implores him to give her back again the symbols of her sacred sorrow. But Brand, though the fiery sword

pierces his heart, dares not yield. The death of Agnes follows.

In the meanwhile the thought, first suggested by Agnes, has germinated in Brand's mind, to apply all the wealth he has inherited from his mother to the building of a new and larger church for the parish. The old church is a miserable ramshackle concern which has neither beauty nor dignity other than that of age. With all his energy he applies himself to this task, and builds at his own expense a beautiful, new edifice, the lofty grandeur of whose proportions shall lift the soul toward God.

At the beginning of the fifth act, the church is about to be dedicated ; and Brand, who (though he has never sought it) has gained a great popularity by his munificence, is the hero of the day. A great concourse of people, including all the notabilities of the district, has gathered about the parsonage, and the festivities are to be opened, in the usual manner, with a procession and speeches. But amid all this festal clamour Brand feels unhappy and alone. The church which he has built fails to give the elevation to his spirit for which he had hoped. What is it, after all, he has tried to do, in substituting the new



church for the old, but to compromise with God? His soul revolts at the praise and the honours which are about to be showered upon him, and when the crowd presses about him and cheers him, he locks the church door, throws the keys into the river, and denounces as futile and worthless the work which he has done. The remonstrance of his ecclesiastical superior, the dean, who (being himself a little man of compromise) is completely at a loss to comprehend Brand's meaning, contains a keen satire on the Norwegian state church — or in fact any official religion. He tells Brand that his business as an officer of the state, is to save souls by wholesale, as it were, but not to bother about individuals. A clergyman is an ecclesiastical corporal who is to maintain a moderately religious tone, in a certain parish which the state has allotted to him; and as a sergeant conducts his soldiers to church by companies, so the parson is to conduct the souls to paradise by parishes.

Brand is of course filled with an unutterable scorn of such a vocation; and maintains his uncompromising attitude. In a kind of religious ecstasy he addresses the people, bidding them follow him out



into the great church of life. He climbs up the mountain-side, and the crowd, full of religious enthusiasm, follows him. This perpetual yearning for higher and still higher heights is symbolic of the whole tendency of Brand's spirit. Such a yearning is in its nature unsatisfiable. Brand continues his symbolic flight higher and higher until the crowd, growing impatient, curses and stones him, and in the end he is buried by an avalanche.

This is perfectly consistent. No man can fathom the infinite; no man can see God and live. The man of heroic mould who ventures upon an Icarian flight toward the sun, with the wax wings of mortality, will and must perish. This is the truth which seems to have impressed the ancient Greeks more than any other; and which *Æschylus* and *Sophocles* are never weary of embodying in beautiful symbols. It seems that modern men have long since been weaned of this desire to measure strength with the gods — to rise to the infinite. Brand, however, is such a man — and he interprets Christianity (which in his opinion has been toned down to suit a petty and unheroic race) in the grand spirit of the old heroic paganism.

He that is not for Me is against Me, said Christ, and a better motto could not have been chosen for "Brand." The baneful spirit of barter and compromise which makes one good deed counterbalance so many bad ones—which makes religion consist in a barren conviction and a little cheap emotion on Sundays—that is the spirit, in the church and out of it, against which Ibsen wages his relentless war.

The atonement, it must be admitted, he leaves entirely out of the question.

A lack of power, of ability, may be pardoned, according to Ibsen ; but a lack of will, never. Your spiritual life is either nothing or it is everything. A half-hearted intention which shrinks from the last and extreme sacrifice (even though it be life itself) is worse than nothing. This is stern doctrine, no doubt, and I cannot believe that it is greatly modified by the Voice from Space, crying amid the roar of the avalanche which buries Brand :—

He is *deus caritatis*.

For the charity which is here predicated of God is clearly manifested toward deficient ability, not toward the shortcomings of the will. If it were

otherwise, the last line of the poem would involve a contradiction of its whole spirit and tendency.

If, indeed, God is *deus caritatis*, then Brand has been woefully mistaken from the beginning, and all the suffering and sacrifice involved in his fidelity to his stern ideal have been wantonly wasted. Agnes and little Alf have then died in vain; and Brand has immolated himself upon the altar of a cruel idol which has no existence except in his own fevered fancy. An importunate query, moreover, obtrudes itself: Has any man the right to sacrifice anyone but himself to his own ideal of duty? Are wife and child merely attributes or accessories which have no right to independent life? Mr. Bernard Shaw, in his book "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," exposes this phase of the problem very strongly, and attaches, I think, an undue weight to it. For he boldly leaps at the conclusion that it is the Christian ideal (which most of us profess, though none of us are able to live up to it) that Ibsen has undertaken to satirise in the person of his hero. Brand is morally a monster, he says in effect, and the religion which could make him behave from conscientious motives with such outrageous

cruelty to his gentle wife, must be a hideous perversion of all true morality.

"Brand," says Mr. Shaw, "aspiring from height to height of devotion to his ideal, plunges from depth to depth of murderous cruelty."<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, an insurmountable obstacle to the adoption of this theory: no one will recognise the spirit of Christianity in Brand. He might possibly pass for an embodiment of the stern spirit of the Old Testament with its demand, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"; but of the loving and compassionate spirit of the Gospels he could not even pass for a caricature. If Ibsen (as Mr. Shaw seems to think) had intended to say: "This is the ideal type of man which your religion would produce if consistently practised," — a warning, accordingly, and not an example, — all I can say is that his poem is a stupendous failure. Why should he be harping all the time with obvious approval, upon the categorical demand "either — or"; why should he place Brand's magnificent courage and uncompromising fidelity in such glaring contrast to the Sheriff's half-hearted and diplomatic cowardice, and the

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Shaw, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," p. 50.

Dean's bland superficiality and deprecation of extremes? No; Ibsen's sympathy is clearly with Brand, or he would have pitched his poem in a wholly different key. But, you will say, he surely does not approve of Brand's sacrifice of every life which is dependent upon his own. Well, judging by the general tenor of Ibsen's philosophy, I am inclined to think that he regards this as the inexorable law of nature, which it is futile to endeavour to evade. The lesser creature is always being sacrificed to the higher creature. Inferior lives minister, at the expense of their own liberty, vitality, and happiness, to superior lives, and fidelity to any purpose or ideal involves perpetual sacrifice. I am not now inquiring into the right or wrong of this proposition; but if Ibsen did not in substance reason thus, he would not be the ruthless individualist that he is.

But why, the perplexed reader will ask, does Brand wreck his life and become a curse to every one whom he loves, in his endeavour to live in absolute accord with the highest demand of duty? Because in a society consisting of mediocrities, founded by mediocrities and adapted for medi-

ocrities, the hero is out of place. He cannot adapt himself to a society thus constituted; and in the conflict which will and must arise between him and it, the hero will perish. Gulliver may have a profound contempt for the Lilliputians; but collectively they are stronger than he. It is, therefore, the half-heartedness, the laxity, the hypocritical insincerity, of society in professing an ideal, beyond its capacity of attainment, which Ibsen satirises in "Brand." That is the key-note which rings through the poem from beginning to end.

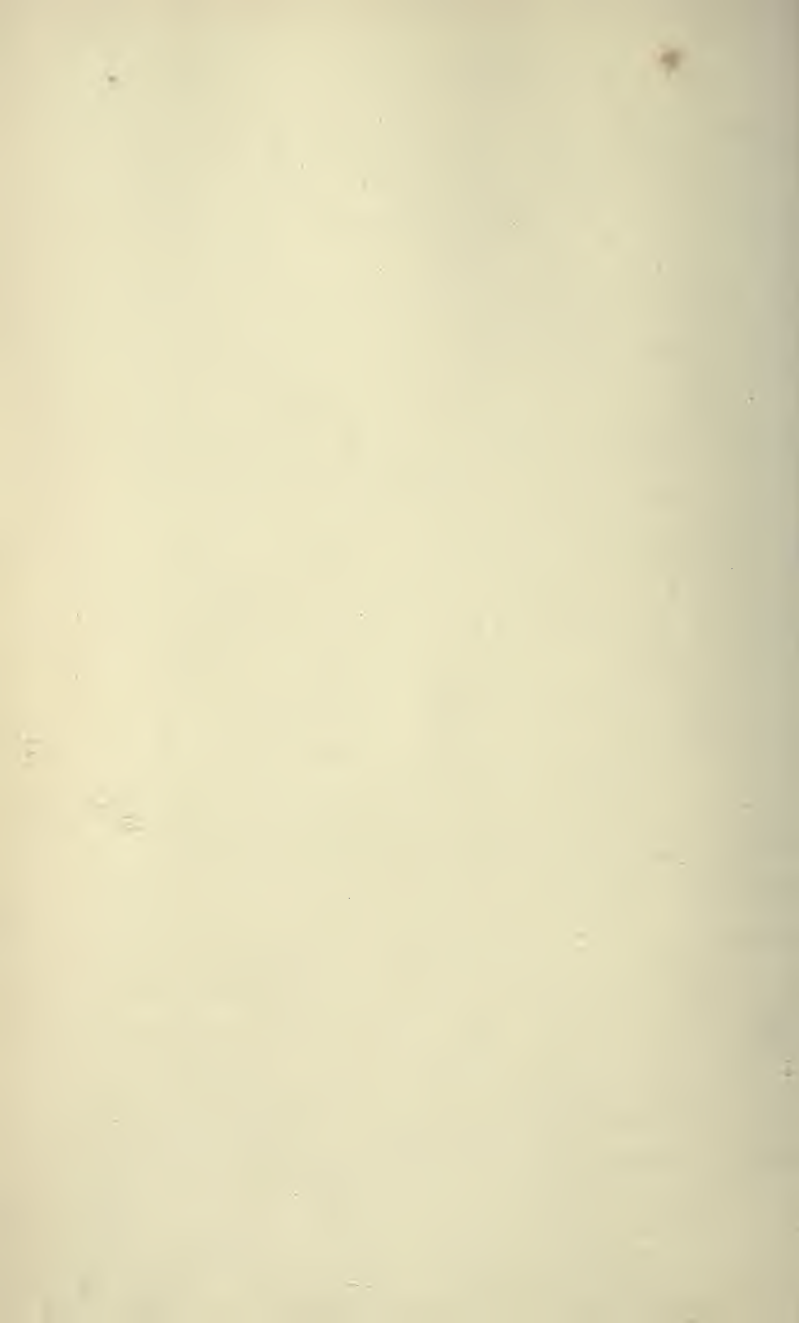
Ibsen has an innate respect for the strong man, the eminent man, the hero. As the plant primarily exists for the sake of the flower, so humanity exists for the sake of those great and radiant individuals which are the blossoms upon the tree of life. It was the wide latitude granted to the mighty of will which appealed to him in the old saga age. Paganism, with its enormous inequalities and the untrammelled liberty it granted to him who was strong enough to conquer it, created heroes and pygmies; while Christianity has raised the small at the expense of the great, and reduced the great for the benefit of the small. This is the democratic ideal, which in a large



measure owes its rise to the Christian idea that we are all God's creatures and all equal before Him. The old Norse Asa faith, on the other hand, was essentially aristocratic. Men were by no means equal before Odin and Thor; and King Eric Blood-Axe secured a much more distinguished reception in Valhalla than any one else we hear of. But modern democracy affects, at least, to regard all men as equals, and it is therefore that Ibsen despises and detests democracy.

Æsthetically considered, the voice from space declaring that God is the God of love, is, therefore, jarring and out of tune with the rest. It looks as if Ibsen, after having carried his doctrine to its logical extreme, had, somehow, been seized with qualms of conscience; and, as a comfort to his brethren of weaker stomach, had added that wholly irrelevant declaration.





## PEER GYNT.

"PEER GYNT," which is the most imaginative of Ibsen's works, was first published in 1867, and after having waited for a quarter of a century, has finally been translated into English. It is primarily a satire on the Norwegian national character, as Ibsen conceives it to be. Peer is meant as the type of the modern Norseman, with his boastful patriotism, which finds consolation in a heroic past for the impotence of the present. His grand intention reconciles him to his paltry performance. He lives a heroic dream-life and deludes himself with visions of glory which he himself half believes to be real. His fantastic mendacity acts as a safety-valve for his pent-up spirit. He "lies himself great." Though to his neighbours and acquaintances he is a worthless and shabby scamp, a liar, a braggart, and a ne'er-do-weel, he is in his own estimation a tremendous fellow; and no amount of ridicule and contempt can disabuse him

of this pleasant illusion. I fancy, however, that the author means to hint, in his persistent emphasis of this motive, that Peer had possibilities in him. His strength finds no field of action in the cramped condition to which his birth has consigned him ; accordingly his restless energy takes refuge in the realm of imagination, where he performs all the fabulous deeds for which reality denies him the opportunity. He is psychologically comprehensible, even when he cuts the sorriest figure ; for it is a fact, and by no means an uncommon one, that the paltriest lives may be irradiated with the fantastic light of wonderland, without being at all, so far as the world is concerned, redeemed from their paltriness.

Brand and Peer Gynt are antipodal characters, spiritual contrasts, and the latter was, no doubt, conceived by the poet as the complete antithesis to the former. Brand is the incorporation of the ideal of renunciation, the realisation of self by the crucifying of self, in obedience to the call of duty which he believes to be from God. Peer Gynt, on the other hand, is the incorporation of the spirit of compromise, the realisation of self by indulgence of self and the satisfaction of every sordid appetite. Peer's

motto is to be himself; and he acts upon the supposition that this precious self of his is realised and developed by giving full sway to every lawless impulse and desire. Brand develops a dominant personality by the crucial test of suffering and sorrow, as the pure metal is purged from the slag in the flaming furnace. Peer Gynt values the crude product of his own self, as it is, and fancies that a mere bundle of appetites, desires, and pretensions constitutes a personality worth cherishing and preserving. There is an obvious allusion here to the Norwegian people, who, according to the poet, in their fabled grandeur forget their littleness, and though habitually governed by mean and petty motives in daily conduct, yet have a tremendous sense of their excellence, as compared with other nations. However, I fancy the Norwegians are not exceptional in this respect; for I never knew a nation yet that was habitually governed by high motives, or one which was not deeply convinced of its superiority to all the rest of the human race.

It is an exceedingly complex question Ibsen touches upon in this problem of self-realisation. What constitutes a man's self? It is, I should say, primarily that spark of vitality which, by an inscrutable law, is

transmitted to him from his parents and remoter ancestors, mysteriously compounded of elements, old and new, but newly related and adjusted in him. In this germ of life the consciousness of self-hood presently awakes. The world, as it is once made, offers a certain resistance to its self-realisation by opposing its wishes ; and in the consequent collision of desires and interests the stronger force will prevail. Though we are all more or less influenced and fashioned by our environment, there comes a time in the life of the strong man when the positive force that is in him asserts itself, and he makes his environment conform to him, instead of himself conforming to it. He actively wields more influence than he passively receives.

Brand, for instance, is such a forceful personality, who compels every life that comes into contact with his to adapt itself to his austere ideal, even though it perish in the attempt. Peer Gynt, on the other hand, has no force to oppose ; he is tossed to and fro like a shuttlecock by every accident that comes in his way. He does not mould circumstances ; but circumstances are perpetually moulding him. There is no innate virtue in him, no inherent power whereby he

can assert his dominance for good or for ill. He does not, like Brand, steer ruthlessly through obstacles, physical and moral, but he goes around them. He grapples with no problem that presents itself, but he shirks it. In every relation of life where the consequences of his past actions overtake him (as when his bastard with the Troll-wench appears at his reunion with Solveig), he turns tail and runs away. Such a person, even though he have, like Peer, an unswerving sense of his own importance and proclaims himself to be "emperor of himself," is of very slight consequence in the world; and so far as the grand result is concerned, it matters not whether he exist at all. At all events, he counts only numerically. He is not a positive personality that contributes aught of spiritual force or virtue toward the evolution of humanity. It is obviously Ibsen's opinion that Peer in this respect is also typical of the Norwegian people. The allusions in the scene of Peer's interview with the Troll-king, "the old man of Dovrë," are so pointed that there is no escape from this conclusion.

The story of the poem is briefly as follows: Peer Gynt, a scion of a once mighty family which has



come down in the world, is upbraided by his mother Aase<sup>1</sup> for having neglected his chance to marry Ingrid, the daughter of the rich farmer of Haegstad, who had been fond of him. Peer avoids the issue and tells her some very tall hunting stories — how he rode on a reindeer buck over the glaciers, etc., and finally, to get rid of her reproaches, lifts her up in his arms and deposits her on the roof of a mill and there leaves her.

He now appears uninvited at the Haegstad wedding, where the bride has shut herself up in the storehouse and refuses to listen to the bridegroom's entreaties. Here Peer Gynt meets Solveig, the daughter of a farmer who has recently arrived from another parish. She knows but little of Peer's reputation, and allows herself to be fascinated by his bold talk and reckless behaviour. She carries henceforth an ideal of him in her own heart, and persistently believes in him in spite of all obloquy. Having steeled his courage by generous potations, Peer relates stories of all his marvellous deeds, and when they are received with taunts and derisive laughter, he resolves for once to justify his repu-

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced *Oasé*.

tation. He breaks into the storehouse, seizes the bride, leaps up the steep rocks where scarcely a goat could follow him, and escapes to the woods.

The second act opens, the next morning, far up in the mountains, where Peer is trying to get rid of Ingrid, of whom he is now tired. The memory of Solveig haunts him — her yellow braids hanging down her back, her modest and demure air, her hymn-book within the folded handkerchief. Ingrid employs both threats and allurements, but all in vain. Peer heartlessly abandons her. Aase, accompanied by Solveig and her parents, seeks her son in the mountains, but without finding him. Peer in the meanwhile has indulged in coarse dissipations, yielding to every temptation that comes in his way. He meets a troll-wench, clad in green, the daughter of the Old Man of Dovrë, and is enticed by her into the mountain. The trolls first propose to kill him; but the old king interferes and offers him his daughter and half the kingdom, if he will remain and be one of them. Peer consents, and in order to fit himself for his new estate has to be remodelled according to troll fashion. To a man like Peer Gynt, convinced of his own excel-

lence and resolved to be himself at all hazards, this is rather hard, but, after some squirming, he reluctantly acquiesces. The motto of the trolls, however, does not differ greatly from his own. It is, "Troll, be sufficient unto thyself."

The satire on the Norse patriotic self-sufficiency, which refuses to learn from other nations and closes itself against the vital currents of thought from the great world because they are not Norse, is keen and trenchant. The injunction of the Dovrë king to Peer, that he must promise to take no account of anything that lies outside of the Rondane Mountains' boundary, hits the nail on the head; but it must be admitted that it had more point in 1867 than it has in 1893. All things that are Norse are for that very reason held to be unsurpassed and unsurpassable; and by a tacit agreement of make-believe, such as small children delight in, the pretence that they are admirable is stoutly maintained, until at last the vision is bewitched and they actually appear admirable.

#### THE DOVRË KING.

And next you must learn to appreciate  
Our homely, everyday way of life.

*(He beckons; two trolls, with pig's heads, white night-caps, and so forth, bring in food and drink.)*

Ask not if its taste be sour or sweet;  
The main matter is, and you mustn't forget it,  
It's all of it home-brewed.

\* \* \* \* \*

And next you must throw off your Christian-man's garb;  
For this you must know to our Dovrë's renown,  
Here all things are mountain-made, naught's from the  
dale,  
Except the silk bow at the end of your tail.

PEER (*indignant*).

I haven't a tail!

THE DOVRË KING.

Then, of course, you must get one.  
Have my Sunday tail, Chamberlain, fastened to him.

PEER (*peevishly*).

Ha! would you force me to go still further?  
Do you ask me to give up my Christian faith?

THE DOVRË KING.

No, that you are welcome to keep in peace.  
Doctrine goes free; upon that there's no duty;  
It's the outward cut one must tell a troll by.  
If we are only one in manners and dress  
You may hold as your faith what to us is a horror.

Having accepted all these conditions, Peer straightway conforms to all the trolls' habits, pretends to find their disgusting food palatable, their hideous faces and costumes beautiful, their discordant noises exquisite music, and their clumsy capers graceful dancing. But when the Dovrë king, seeing how much it goes against the grain with Peer, offers to slit his eyes, so that he may acquire the trolls' perverted vision, and see things actually as he now pretends to see them, Peer makes objections, and after a lengthy altercation is thrown out of the mountain. Groping in the dark outside, he touches something huge and slimy, which bids him go around. This is "the great Boyg," a monstrous troll of Norwegian folk-tale, which symbolises custom, habit, public opinion. It is, like the great Boyg, always itself, and nothing else, and can give no other account of itself. It compels you to "go around," not *through* obstacles, to suspend your individuality; to yield and compromise rather than assert your personal force or conviction.

During his roamings in the mountains Peer finds Solveig, who, impelled by her love, has sought him far and near. Being outlawed, on account of his

exploit at the Haegstad wedding, he builds a log hut in the woods, which to his fancy appears a magnificent castle, and over the door of which he has nailed a pair of antlers. Just as he has resolved to live here with Solveig, the troll-wench appears with a hideous imp, which is the result of their intercourse, and demands her share of him and the log hut. Peer loses courage, leaves Solveig in the lurch, and flees again to the valley. There he finds his mother on her deathbed; and in a wonderfully touching scene he refuses as ever to face the situation, but beguiles her dying hour with a motley phantasmagoria of folk tales and wildly distorted facts and fancies.

The fourth act opens with a scene in the Mediterranean on the coast of Morocco. Many years have elapsed, and Peer, now a middle-aged man, has returned in his own pleasure yacht from America, where he has made a fortune by profitable speculation in slaves, Bibles, missionary enterprises, whiskey, and whatever else has come in his way. His companions flatter him and pay him the homage due to the successful man; but when he goes ashore, they sail away with his yacht and



all his treasures. Peer in the meanwhile has become quite pious and his various successes have strengthened him in the belief that he is under the special protection of God, who watches over his interests and takes care that no harm befalls him. This conviction, however, receives a rude shock when his treacherous comrades desert him, but is again restored when the yacht is blown up before his eyes and the traitors perish. It is then he exclaims:—

How blissful to feel so uplifted in spirit,  
To think nobly is more than to know oneself rich,  
Only trust in Him. He well knows what share  
Of the chalice of woe I can bear to drain.  
He takes fatherly thought for my personal need—

*(Casts a glance out over the sea and whispers  
with a sigh.)*

But economical—no, that He isn't.

His adventure with the Arab dancing-girl Anitra, his brief honours as a prophet, his questioning of the Sphinx, and his experience in the madhouse near Cairo, where he is crowned "emperor of himself," occupy the remainder of the act. He takes great pride now in his shabby, tortuous, pliable self, by

being which he has wound himself so dexterously through the world, and achieved such varied successes in such varied fields of enterprise. At the opening of the fifth act we meet him as a vigorous old man on board a ship bound for Norway. The ugliness of his character (if anything so negative can be called character) has hardened the lines of his face; but in his supreme self-satisfaction he has no suspicion of his own unloveliness. A stiff gale blows up which increases to a storm, and the ship is wrecked. While struggling on a plank in the water, and quaking at the thought of death, Peer is confronted with a most uncomfortable passenger, who tries to rouse in him through wholesome terror a consciousness of his paltriness. But Peer shirks as usual, and is only bent upon saving his life. He finally drifts ashore, and, after various adventures, comes to the log hut in the forest where Solveig sits, still awaiting his return. He hears her singing within:—

Now all is ready after Whitsun eve,  
Dearest boy of mine, far away,  
Comest thou soon?  
Is thy burden heavy?

Take time, take time ;  
 I will await thee ;  
 I promised of old.

PEER (*rises quiet and deadly pale*).

One that's remembered — and one that's forgot —  
 One that has squandered — and one that has saved —  
 Oh, earnest ! — and never can the game be played o'er !  
 Oh, anguish ! — here was my empire, indeed.

Yes, here was his empire, if he had but known it. If he had valued at its supreme worth the love he had won — if he had had the strength to rise to Solveig's conception of him, he would have had here a happy kingdom. The fantastic web of dreams and lies which made up the tissue of his youth mocks him in retrospect. He runs away from it all over a forest waste in which fire has been raging. Beautifully imaginative is the symbolic scene with the worsted-balls, the withered leaves, and the broken straws.

PEER (*listless*).

What is this like children weeping ?  
 Weeping, but half-way to song, —  
 Thread-balls at my feet are rolling !

(*Kicking at them.*)

Off with you ! you block my path !

THE THREAD-BALLS.

We are thoughts ;  
 Thou should'st have thought us ;  
 Feet to run on  
 Thou should'st have given us !

PEER *(going round about)*.

I have given life to *one* ;  
 'Twas a bungled, crook-legged thing.

THE THREAD-BALLS.

We should have soared up  
 Like clangorous voices, —  
 And here we must trundle  
 As gray-yarn thread-balls.

PEER *(stumbling)*.

Thread-clue, you accursed scamp,  
 Would you trip your father's heels?

WITHERED LEAVES.

We are watchwords ;  
 Thou should'st have proclaimed us !  
 See how thy dozing  
 Has wofully riddled us.  
 The worm has gnawed us  
 In every crevice ;  
 We have never twined us  
 Like wreaths round fruitage.

So the songs which he should have sung, the tears which he should have shed, and the deeds which he should have done, rise up symbolically, with accusing voices, sounding in his ears in the sighing of the wind, the dripping of the dewdrops, and the crackling of the broken straws under his feet. Presently Peer stumbles in his aimless flight upon a most unpleasant customer—a Button-Moulder, who is Death in disguise. He tells Peer that his grave is dug and his coffin ordered, and the time has come for him to be moulded over. Peer is terribly shocked at this proposition. He who has always insisted upon being himself can surely not consent to have his soul put into the casting-ladle and melted up like an old coin that is valuable only for its crude metal, from which a new coin can perhaps be made. But the Button-Moulder will take no refusal. The exposition in the following dialogue is refreshingly clear and luminous, and contains in a nutshell the theme of the poem:—

PEER.

I'm sure I deserve better treatment than this;  
 I'm not nearly so bad as perhaps you think;  
 I've done a good deal of good in the world;

At worst you may call me a sort of bungler ;  
But certainly not an exceptional sinner.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Why, that's precisely the rule, my man ;  
You're no sinner at all in the highest sense,  
That's why you're excused all the torture-pangs  
And land, like others, in the casting-ladle.

\* \* \* \* \*

You are, with your own lips you told me so,  
No sinner on the so-called heroic scale,  
Scarce middling even —

PEER.

Ah, now you're beginning to talk common sense —

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

Just have patience a bit —  
But to call you virtuous would be going too far.

PEER.

Well, you know I have never laid claim to that.

THE BUTTON-MOULDER.

You're just medium then, or only just so-so.  
A sinner of really grandiose style  
Is nowadays not to be met on the highways.  
For that more is demanded than to wallow in mire ;  
Both vigour and earnestness are required for a sin.



Like all the unsuccessful waste human material which turns out nothing in particular, Peer can therefore claim no individual immortality; for there is nothing individual in him to survive. This thought, which Lessing was one of the first to express (unless Plato, who said most things thinkable on this subject, may have anticipated him), is repeatedly hinted at in Browning; only with him it is rather the careless butterfly soul, living its life only in the senses, and unconscious of any higher aspiration which forfeits its immortality:—

As for Venice and her people, simply born to bloom  
and drop,

Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly  
were the crop.

What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to  
stop?

I fancy that most of us who share Peer Gynt's conviction as to his own preciousness, would plead as earnestly, and be as deeply revolted at this idea of individual extinction. And especially those of us who share his fatal delusion that a mere incorporated appetite, feebly flavoured by a few foolish vanities and pretensions, constitutes an individuality,

would echo his alarmed outcry, his strenuous arguments, and his entreaties to be granted a respite wherein to procure witnesses and testimonials as to his worth and character. The Button-Moulder finally grants his request, and leaves him with the warning that they will meet again at the next cross-roads. Peer goes to the troll-king, the Old Man of Dovrë, and begs him to testify to the fact that he had refused to have his eyes slit and be transformed into a troll. But the old man reminds him that he had adopted, in practice, the trolls' motto; and that he has, as a matter of fact, always lived like a troll. Therefore he declines to grant the testimonial. At the next meeting with the Button-Moulder Peer succeeds in securing another respite, which is to be the last. In his desperate strait he seeks a lean wayfarer, clad in clerical garb, who turns out to be his Satanic Majesty. Peer, in his utter horror of personal extinction, applies to him for a temporary abiding-place, and recounts all his sins, making them as black as possible, in the hope of securing admittance. But Satan laughs at them all, as being of no account, and laments the constant decrease in the supply of souls. The great sinners

are getting scarcer and scarcer; and the bulk of humanity have to be re-cast and re-cast, before they attain any sort of definite individuality, fit either for heaven or hell.

Peer, crushed and terrified, trembles at the thought of his next meeting with the Button-Moulder. Then he bethinks him of his sin against Solveig, which must certainly be black enough to entitle him to survival in hell; and on the "quick soles of anguish" he hastens to her cabin in the woods, pursued by the Button-Moulder. This time he does not go around, but rushes straight in, crying aloud to Solveig to proclaim his sin. Solveig, who is a blind old woman, straight-backed and gentle, recognises his voice and goes to meet him.

PEER (*flings himself down on the threshold*).

Hast thou doom for a sinner, so speak it forth!

SOLVEIG.

He is here! he is here! Oh, to God be the praise!

(*Stretches out her arms as though groping for him.*)

PEER.

Cry out all my sins and my trespasses.

SOLVEIG.

In naught hast thou sinned, oh mine own only boy.

(*Gropes for him again and finds him.*)

THE BUTTON-MOULDER (*behind the house*).

The sin-list, Peer Gynt !

PEER.

Cry aloud my crime !

SOLVEIG (*sits down beside him*).

Thou hast made all my life a beautiful song.

Blesséd be thou that at last thou hast come !

Blesséd, thrice blesséd, our Whitsun morn meeting.

PEER.

Then I am lost !

Peer, in the hope of wringing from her an accusation, asks her if she knows where he has been since he left her ; to which she replies with the beautiful confidence of a loving woman : " In my faith, in my hope, in my love."

PEER.

Thou art mother thyself to the man that's there.

SOLVEIG.

Ay, that I am ; but who is his father !

Surely he that forgives at a mother's prayer.

PEER. (*A light shines in his face; he cries.*)

My mother; my wife; oh, thou innocent woman!  
In thy love, oh there hide me, hide me.

(*Clings to her and hides his face in her lap. A long silence. The sun rises.*)

Sentimentally satisfying though this ending is, it is to my mind a trifle melodramatic and leaves the problem unsolved. Whether Peer's destiny is left undecided, or his final salvation is implied, it leaves him, personally, just as paltry as ever, and worthy of no better fate than the Button-Moulder's ladle. I can comprehend how a good woman's love can become the saving of a man, if he shares his life with her, or in noble renunciation cherishes his own love for her, and tries to live up to her ideal of him. But I cannot comprehend how a woman's love can change the substance and fundamental character of a man's soul, and make of a hoary poltroon like Peer Gynt anything but what he is. That would simply mean his extinction. It is surely not for his worth that Solveig loves him; and I cannot conceive of any natural or even miraculous process by which her affection can be imputed to him as a merit, far less transform him

(when he is probably well up in the seventies) into anything sufficiently definite and stanchly individual, to exempt him from the cruelly beneficent law which the poet himself has expounded in such masterly dialectics. Ibsen is the last poet from whom we should have expected such a concession to a mere romantic convention. If the retort is made that Goethe has done the very same thing in the Second Part of "Faust," I must beg to differ. Faust, after his sin, passes through a long discipline of sorrow and purifying experience, before he is reunited with Margaret in heaven. The whole Second Part, which is supposed to occupy nearly half a century, is devoted to his spiritual and intellectual development.

In spite of this flaw in "Peer Gynt," which probably nine readers out of ten would count a merit, I yield to no one in recognition of the brilliant originality, vigour of thought, and keenness of wholesome satire which the poem, as a whole, displays.





## THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH.

OF all Ibsen's plays "The League of Youth" is undoubtedly the one which has the closest application to American conditions. Its satire loses none of its sting to us, because we are perfectly acquainted with the political types which are here introduced, even though they may have been somewhat modified by the changed environment. Democracy is Ibsen's bugbear; for, as he has frequently betrayed, he has but a poor opinion of the average man. Democracy means to him, as it did to Carlyle, the government of fools by fools.

The first scene of "The League of Youth" represents a 17th of May festival in the open air. The 17th of May is the Norwegian day of liberty, when the free constitution was signed at Eidsvold in 1814, and it is enthusiastically celebrated in all parts of the country with speeches, songs, and processions. Mr. Lundestad, a worthy old peasant, who has for

many years represented the district in the Storting, is making his annual regulation speech, and the people are cheering. A little clique of malcontents are, however, gathered about Mr. Monsen, a rich upstart of doubtful antecedents, who had long been Lundestad's rival for parliamentary honours. A young lawyer, Mr. Steensgaard, who is a new-comer in the district, is being initiated by Monsen and his son Bastian into the mysteries of the local politics, when Lundestad, having finished his speech, approaches them and calls their attention to the fact that the tables at which they are seated are reserved for Chamberlain Bratsberg and party. The Chamberlain is the great local magnate, and Monsen and his friends retire grumblingly and with ill-concealed indignation. Mr. Steensgaard, who is himself of plebeian origin, works himself into a passion over this slight to his dignity and that of the sovereign people; and his sense of outrage is heightened by his personal grudge against Mr. Bratsberg, upon whom he has made repeated calls, without being received. From the pestiferous gossip and mischief-maker Daniel Heire (who claims to have been financially ruined by Bratsberg), he learns that the latter

has referred to him as a radical and a soldier of fortune, and he resolves in revenge to form a society called "The League of Youth," the object of which is to overthrow the Chamberlain, and to make an end of the sleepy conservative *régime* which supports him, and by which he is supported. He mounts the rostrum and delivers a clever and slashing speech against Mr. Bratsberg, which the latter greatly enjoys, being under the impression that it is directed against his adversary, Monsen. He therefore sends the orator a note, inviting him to a party at his house. This note is delivered to Steensgaard just as he has been elected president of "The League of Youth," and, flushed with triumph, is preparing to open his campaign. He has, in the meanwhile, resolved to marry Monsen's daughter, Ragna, in order to profit by her father's wealth, and identify himself completely with the party of opposition.

In the first scene of the second act we find him repenting of his hasty choice. The delightful atmosphere of refinement and culture in the Chamberlain's house intoxicates him, and gives him a glimpse of what his life might be if transplanted into this exquisite, rich, and tempered climate.

Aslaksen, the printer and publisher of the local weekly, calls very inopportunistically for the promised copy of yesterday's harangue and the constitution of "The League of Youth," which Steensgaard refuses to furnish. The situation is now no longer the same, he says; the affair has entered upon a new stage. The alluring prospect of marrying Thora Bratsberg, the Chamberlain's daughter, is dancing before his vision, and all his ideas, adjusting themselves to this new ambition, have, in the meanwhile, changed colour. Now, he discovers in retrospect all that was crude and odious about Monsen and his circle. The rooms at Storli were pervaded by the odour of bad tobacco, the manners were rude and boisterous; even the cordiality was over-emphatic and offensive. "But here," he says to his friend, Dr. Fjeldbo, "here are fine manners: here the floor is made to be trodden, as it were, only by lacquered boots. Here the easy-chairs are deep, and the ladies sit beautifully in them. Here conversation goes lightly and elegantly like a game of battledore. Here no blunders come plumping in and produce an awkward silence. . . . Here one feels what gentility means. Yes, for we have really

an aristocracy ; a small, select circle ; an aristocracy of culture, and to that I will belong."

But in order to reach this goal he must undo his blunder of yesterday. He must apologise for his rudeness to the Chamberlain. During a game of forfeit he seizes his opportunity, telling an ingenious fable about an eagle and a cuckoo, the meaning of which is obvious, and he ends, moreover, with a direct apology in *propria persona*. Bratsberg, who had until this moment chuckled over Monsen's discomfiture, is thunderstruck. He is so overwhelmed by emotion that he comes near losing consciousness. Steensgaard, however, who has an indomitable confidence in his own powers of persuasion, repeats his visit the next day, and with the sublimest impudence offers the outraged dignitary the choice between friendship and support, on the one hand, and war to the knife. He formally applies for his daughter's hand ; but is contemptuously refused and shown the door.

After Steensgaard's departure Monsen enters, asking Bratsberg to endorse certain notes, and offering him great inducements for the use of his name. He, too, is indignantly repelled, and utters



dire threats as he takes his leave. Erik Bratsberg, the Chamberlain's son, has, it appears, entered into a commercial partnership with Monsen, and has, in order to meet his obligations, forged his father's name. The father is urged, in order to save the family honour, to acknowledge the signature. But, much though he prizes this family honour, he replies sternly: "That is an affair between the criminal and the law."

Steensgaard, after having been snubbed by the aristocrat, falls back upon his "League of Youth," by whose aid he is first chosen an elector,<sup>1</sup> and then pushed into prominence as a parliamentary candidate. Lundestad, not wishing to risk defeat, renounces his candidacy in his favour, and for a while everything goes swimmingly. Feeling the need of identifying himself completely with the district, the young demagogue renews his attentions to Ragna Monsen, but having gained possession of Erik Bratsberg's forged note, he repents of his rashness and makes renewed overtures to Miss Bratsberg. His first intention is to use it as blackmail, but having

<sup>1</sup> In Norway the members of the Storting are not chosen by direct vote, but by electors, chosen by the qualified voters. — H. H. B.

been persuaded that it is worthless for this purpose, he returns it with a great show of magnanimity to the Chamberlain. There is a delightful passage in Steensgaard's conversation with Dr. Fjeldbo, *à propos* of his proposed matrimonial alliances, which I cannot deny myself the pleasure of quoting : —

STEENSGAARD. . . . I must save myself out of all this ugliness which clings to me here. I can no longer live in this confusion. Here I must go and allow myself to be hooked by the arm by Ole Person and Per Olsen; I must whisper with them in corners, must laugh at their beer witticisms, be hail-fellow-well-met with seminarists and half-cut rascals. *How can I preserve myself fresh in my love for the people in the midst of all this?* It is as if the kindling word failed me. I have no elbow-room. Oh, I feel at times such a yearning for refined women ! ”

It is of course only to his friend, Fjeldbo, that the political aspirant dares speak in this key. He is, it must be admitted, no very deep villain, no darkly plotting intriguer. What redeems his character is a certain fatuous frankness — a certain *naïve* self-confidence, and an egotism which in its candour is almost comical. He is not astute enough to be wicked. He has little in common with the American type of politicians, except his unscrupulous use of everybody

that can serve his ends, and his readiness to change his opinions in accordance with the requirements of the occasion. Of convictions he has none; only an insatiable appetite for success, and an invincible confidence in the star of his fortune. He is, according to Ibsen, just the stuff that public men are made of in democratic countries, though somewhat modified by his Norse origin and environment. It would not surprise the author to see him one day at the goal of his desires,—as a great public character. His discomfiture in the play is, after all, only a temporary check, due to youth and inexperience. He has too many strings to his bow, and he is not quite skilful enough to keep them from getting tangled. In endeavouring to trap the others, he contrives to trap himself.

It is plain to him that in order to inspire respect and flatter the local sentiment he must marry—and marry prudently, with a view to his political advancement. While the Bratsberg alliance seems hopeless, and the Monsen alliance undesirable, on account of the rumoured bankruptcy of the house, he is seized with the idea that Mrs. Rundholmen, the tavern-keeper,—a middle-aged widow of mature

charms, — would be a capital match for a man who wishes to identify himself with the people. Bastian Monsen is simultaneously inspired with a similar sentiment for the rich widow, and persuades Steensgaard to be his *postillon d'amour*. Steensgaard has in his pocket a letter of his own, containing a proposal of marriage ; but (by the familiar stage decree) exchanges the letters, despatching Bastian's epistle under the impression that it is his own. In the final scene, when the various engagements are declared at the Bratsberg mansion, he therefore finds himself *de trop*. Dr. Fjeldbo carries off the first prize, Miss Bratsberg, a certain Mr. Helle the second, Miss Monsen, and Bastian glories in the possession of the substantial Mrs. Rundholmen. For all that, the star of hope still lingers over Steensgaard's head. We feel that he has a career before him, in spite of, or by virtue of, his moral defects, and Lundestad's remark is evidently meant to be prophetic : "Well, you only look out, gentlemen. In ten or fifteen years Steensgaard will be sitting in the peoples' or in the king's council — perhaps in both."

"The League of Youth" is Ibsen's first realistic play ; and in verisimilitude, vividness of colour, and

lifelike movement, it is unsurpassed by any of his later productions. The dialogue is matchless in its unforced naturalness; the satire is restrained and moderate, and does not degenerate into caricature; and the characters are drawn with a firmness and security which betray the master. What beautiful impartiality, for instance, in the contrasted figures of Bratsberg and Monsen! Ibsen's sympathy is obviously with the former; but that does not prevent him from drawing him with a cool appreciation of all his limitation. Bratsberg is in league with the past. He is an excellent, somewhat pig-headed man, of inflexible integrity, who looks askance at all the developments of modern society, and praises the good old times. His intelligence is not sufficiently alert to enable him to comprehend the century in which his lot is cast, and with a fatuous over-valuation of his own power and importance, he fights a losing battle against the spirit of the age. Lundestad, the member of parliament, is another interesting modification of the conservative. His whole endeavour is directed toward preserving the precious institutions inherited from the fathers. He regards liberty as something



valuable which can be locked up securely in a safe, and the key turned in the lock, so that no one can injure or steal it. He accepts what has been accomplished for human progress ; but it does not occur to him that no stage of development is final, that the advancement of the race requires a perpetual and unending labour.

Monsen, the ruthlessly aggressive plebeian, who by his financial success has acquired an insolent self-confidence, and hungers for political distinction, is not an attractive figure, but Ibsen disdains to deny him full justice. The following conversation between Monsen and Bratsberg testifies to the author's scrupulous impartiality. The Chamberlain has been reproaching the lumber-merchant for not remaining contentedly in the inferior position in which he was born.

THE CHAMBERLAIN. Was it perhaps a disgrace to be in my service? Your father supported himself honestly, and was esteemed in his station.

MONSEN. Yes ; until he lost his health by his work, and at last was buried in the cataract with the log jam. Do you know anything of life under such conditions, Mr. Chamberlain? Have you tried, only once, what people



must endure who toil for you in the woods and along the rivers, while you sit in your comfortable parlour and enjoy the fruits? Can you blame a man born to such a life, if he tries to work his way up?

No. The author is well aware that the conservatism or radicalism of a person is largely determined by the circumstances of his birth. Both are equally legitimate and equally indispensable in the evolution of humanity.

## POEMS.

DR. GEORG BRANDES, who possesses an extraordinary gift of epigrammatic statement, has remarked of Ibsen, that he has had a lyrical Pegasus killed under him. Nothing can more happily account for the extreme bitterness of tone, the sarcasm, the utter disillusion, which predominate in Ibsen's verse. It coincides with the poet's own declaration in his *Millennial Ode* (July 18, 1872), which commences:—

My people, thou that poured'st out to me  
The bitter but salubrious elixir,  
Whence strength I drank, upon the grave's dark brink,  
In broken beams of day to fight my battle —  
Oh, thou that gavest me the staff of exile,  
And sorrow's load, the rapid soles of anguish,  
The outfit, grave and heavy, for my journey —  
To thee I send my greeting from the world.

This is the burden of Ibsen's verse, and the dominant note in all his autobiographical utterances. His country has spurned, maltreated, and despitefully

used him. He admits the wholesomeness of the discipline, and yet harboured, until recently, some resentment. It is in his lyrics that a poet is likely to undisguise himself most unreservedly, and Ibsen's lyrics do, indeed, reveal his personality in a striking light. The charm of this personality lies, to me, primarily in its admirable distinctness and distinction. Genial and lovable it is surely not. But it has neither a parallel nor a predecessor in literary history. With what a clear, sharp, refreshingly definite profile it traces itself against all the dim and blurred flabbiness of contemporary literature! It is etched on the century's page in the most biting acids.

There was a time when, under the influence of "Love's Comedy" and "The League of Youth," I conceived of Ibsen as a kind of Schopenhauer dramatised. The personal resentment of real or fancied wrongs, which so largely coloured Schopenhauer's philosophy, I recognised in nearly every one of Ibsen's poems then published. But as with each successive work, the poet's physiognomy stood out in clearer relief, I arrived at the conclusion that my classification was defective. As, however,

I could not give up the attempt to discover his spiritual affinities, I tried Voltaire, with whose *gaieté de cœur* and arsenal of winged epigrams he is unprovided; Rousseau, whose deep, revolutionary radicalism he possesses, but whose warm eloquence and maudlin sentimentality he lacks; Carlyle, whose rugged force, roaring indignation, luminous inspiration of phrase and moral Berserker rage he never approaches, but whose disgust at democracy and keenness in detecting the pitfalls of civilisation he has more than rivalled. He has assumed the same sort of moral censorship, though with a more incisive equipment on the side of the intellect, and a far scantier one on the side of the emotions. Ibsen's cold "dry-light" sheds a clearer, more pitiless illumination upon the moral problem, than Carlyle's storm-beleaguered Scotch beacon, whose warm, warning rays often pierce far into the gloom, but in the end are lost in the encompassing mists.

The last spirit I found who displayed a kinship to Ibsen was Henri Beyle (Stendhal), whose intense individualism, corrosive irony, and detestation of moral cant he shares, but from whose morbid self-consciousness, outspoken sensualism, and half-dis-

tracted chase after the effective he is far removed. But the most radical difference lies in this: Beyle's mask is Ibsen's real countenance, or, at least, strongly resembles it. What with Beyle were largely fads and hobbies, are with Ibsen convictions. When the former went about pricking every bubble whose iridescent beauty danced in the sunlight, it was in a spirit of wanton bravado, because it gave him pleasure to demonstrate (what thousands knew as well as he) that it was hollow. When, however, Ibsen engages in the same occupation, it is in as serious a mood as that of Don Quixote when he charged on the wind-mills. I do not mean to imply that the evils which Ibsen assails are imaginary, though (truth to tell) there is a dire lack of humour in the man's composition—a total want of that genial warmth of soul and sympathy with folly which is the chief ingredient of humour; and this fatal defect makes him, at times, mistake the proportion of things, and attack mole-hills with his heaviest artillery. There is always another side, and one well worth presenting, to each of his indictments of the human race in general, and the Norwegian part of it in particular.

An early friend of Carlyle, Margaret Gordon, with the charming complacency of young ladyhood, wrote to the author of "*Sartor Resartus*" a letter full of benevolent advice, of which the following is an extract:—

"Cultivate the milder dispositions of the heart, subdue the mere extravagant visions of the brain. Genius will render you great. May virtue render you beloved. Remove the awful distance between you and other men by kind and gentle manners. Deal gently with their inferiority; and be convinced that they will respect you as much, and like you more."

This dear young lady could probably never have been made to understand that, if Carlyle had been capable of profiting by her advice, he would simply have extinguished himself. He would not have been Carlyle. He would, no doubt, have been a much better husband to Mrs. Carlyle, and a better friend to Mill and Mazzini; but he would scarcely, in other respects, have been worth remembering. Being deeply convinced of the inexorable fixity of a character like Ibsen's, I should never be guilty of the impertinence of offering him advice in this



spirit, or even wishing that he were otherwise. I have heard many Norwegians repeat, in substance, the sentiment of the above letter, and apply it to their ruthless satirist. In their virtuous self-satisfaction they were blind to the fact that an Ibsen thus reconstructed and harmonised could never have framed the scathing indictments of "Brand" and "Peer Gynt," or the terrible pathological diagnosis of "Ghosts." He would simply have been one of the herd who plod laboriously from the cradle to a nameless grave, in resigned normal obscurity. What may appear as strictures upon Ibsen's character are, accordingly, not offered in the spirit of censure, but merely as critical definitions. I do not want him to be affectionate, benevolent, and genial. I do not, like the Button-Moulder in "Peer Gynt," wish to remould him into the common likeness of his kind. I merely desire to draw him dispassionately as he is, or as I conceive him to be; or rather, I shall offer him the opportunity to trace his own mental physiognomy by translating a few of his most striking poems.

Any one who has attempted to translate verse, and particularly Ibsen's verse, will concede that

this is no easy task. For each phrase is so laconic, so keenly incisive, that either rhyme or sense will seem to suffer in the transposition into an alien tongue. Musical these poems are not. They are written with a plain and calm directness, and without the remotest appreciation of the melodious resources of the language, as, for instance, Welhaven and the Dane Christian Winter revealed them. Ibsen has something urgent to say, which gives him no peace until he has said it; and he chooses to say it in verse, because rhythm and rhyme lend emphasis and impressiveness to speech, and lift it, as it were, into a higher region of memorable sentiment.

One seems to see in Ibsen's poems the grave, shy boy, averse to play, upon whose imagination the lock-up, the pillory, and the mad-house of his native town exercised a shuddering fascination. His experience was, however, in that respect, scarcely exceptional. Even to a normally cheerful child, horror has, in those years, an irresistible attraction. But the remarkable part of Ibsen's confession is the reversal of the normal experience in later years. Is it because he sees more deeply than the herd, and perceives riddles and problems

demanding solution, where the thoughtless see only commonplaces? Is it, therefore, that the daylight is to him thronged with goblins, more terrible, by far, than those of the night?

Mysterious, in brightest light of day,  
Is Nature, and her veil cannot be sundered.  
What freely she will not reveal to you,  
You can't extort from her with screws and levers,

says Goethe in "Faust"; and to the profounder vision this is most profoundly true. This view is far removed from the mere superficial melancholy, which, at times, has taken possession of us all, at the perishability of mundane beauty and loveliness; for I fancy that to Ibsen the perishability of earthly things is the one hopeful fact upon which he is inclined to felicitate himself. The goblin which haunts him is the awful, unappeasable spirit of doubt and eternal questioning, which rises in the broad daylight, like the dread Afrite from the jar in the "Arabian Nights." This is, to him, the death's-head at the banquet of life, which steadily stares at him out of its empty eye-sockets. It is a kindred idea, though clad in different imagery, which is expressed in the poem "Bird and Bird-Catcher"—

## BIRD AND BIRD-CATCHER.

As a boy, a trap I fashioned,  
Caught within its bars a linnet,  
Saw, with wanton glee impassioned,  
How the poor bird fluttered in it.

As into the house my captive  
Swift I bore, my joy was heightened ;  
There the bird with wrathful glances  
And with threatening starts I frightened.

When, at length, I grew a-weary,  
And my wanton mood had shifted,  
'Neath the table I concealed me —  
Warily the door I lifted !

Lo, his wings how glad he stretches,  
Out to life and freedom speeding :  
Dashes headlong — 'gainst the window,  
And lies stunned, and crushed, and bleeding.

Captured bird, thou hast thy vengeance :  
Now the boy, imprisoned, shivers  
In a cage, where he, bewildered,  
Beats against the bars and quivers.

For at him, through prison grating,  
Stares an eye with terror in it ;  
And this eye sends shudders through him,  
As his frightened once the linnet.

And when oft ajar, he fancies,  
Is the window — freedom lures him —  
With a broken wing he tumbles  
In the cage, which still immures him.

Who, of deeper thought, has not felt this "eye with terror in it," staring at him with a cold and steady gaze out of the dread infinities and eternities which surround him? In childhood it was the watchful eye of God (as it was represented on the title-page of the old catechism), which, with a stern but fatherly supervision, kept account of our small peccadilloes, with a view to the final day of reckoning. Uncomfortable and highly inconvenient though it was, when you were bent on unlawful adventures, there was something wholesomely restraining and intelligently human in this grave, all-seeing eye; and there was, moreover, an implication of paternal interest which was, on the whole, flattering. But, as with the years the childlike faith departed, the stern admonitory look vanished, and the human quality was at times chilled into a mere blank stare of freezing terror. It is this awful inhuman gaze which glares at the poet through the prison bars of mortality, giving no hint of

an answer to the importunate queries which Omar Khayam so boldly framed eight hundred years ago : —

What, without asking, hither hurried whence?

And, without asking, whither hurried hence?

Oh, many a cup of this forbidden wine

Must drown the memory of that insolence.

Ibsen's refusal to rest satisfied with the usual shallow solution, or despair of solution, of life's problems, — his restless burrowing in the dark for some unsuspected clue, some treasure of deeper wisdom, — is strikingly symbolised in the poem, "The Miner."

### THE MINER.

Mountain, burst with brawl and glow

'Neath my heavy hammer's blow ;

Downward to the deeps profound,

Till I hear the metal sound.

Deep within the mountain's night,

Treasures fair allure my sight, —

Diamonds, precious gems untold, —

'Twixt the flaming veins of gold.



In the deep — ah, there is peace —  
Peace and desert — life's surcease !  
Hammer, break thy way unbidden  
To the heart of what is hidden !

As a boy, how oft sat I  
Glad, beneath the starry sky :  
Flowery paths of spring I trod,  
In my heart the peace of God.

But the day that brightly laughed  
In the midnight of the shaft  
I forgot, with sun and song,  
In the mine's dark pit, ere long.

When I first descended there,  
Oft I thought with guileless air :  
Spirits in the deep that reign  
Life's deep riddle shall explain.

But as yet no spirit spoke  
And the heavy darkness broke,  
Yet no ray that knowledge brings  
Which illumes the roots of things.

Have I erred then? Does indeed  
This my path to clearness lead?  
For the sunshine blinds my eye  
When I seek for light on high.

No, the deeps I will explore !  
There is peace forevermore.  
Hammer, break thy way unbidden  
To the heart of what is hidden !

Hammer blow on hammer blow,  
Until life's expiring throe !  
Yet no ray of dawn breaks o'er me,  
And no sun of hope before me.

There is not a gleam in Ibsen of that joyous observation, that delight in the mere outward pagantry of life which has been supposed to be a peculiarity of the poetic temperament. Björnson sings of the grandeur of his native Romsdal; Wergeland goes into raptures over the beauty of Maridal, Hardanger, and the Sognefjord; and Welhaven celebrates in a series of poems the picturesqueness of Norse scenery under the varying moods of the day and the year. But not a single poem can I discover in Ibsen's collection which appeals primarily to the pictorial fancy. In the two poems "At Akershus," and "Life on the Mountains," there is some very good, terse, realistic landscape-painting, which betrays a steady hand and a keen, dispassionate power of observation; but in each the

landscape is only of secondary importance, serving as a background, in one case, for a bloody historical scene, and in the other, for a modern "morality" from which the Ibsenian spirit of doubt is not missing. Here, as in Goethe's "Faust," Mephisto has been given as a companion to man; and the man who has not known him is but a grown-up child, whose thoughtless immaturity provokes the poet's pity. He counts for nothing on the great battle-field of thought. To the dairy-maid in the poem who stands "dumb, wrapped in the glow and shade" of the sunset, staring at this "serious elf," the enlargement of her vision, the deepening of her life which results from the encounter, is a boon which she is herself, probably, incapable of valuing at its worth.

This comes as near to Ibsen's lighter vein—which is yet far from being light—as anything he has written. I am aware that the poem "Complications" has an almost sportive movement, and might accordingly, by a superficial reader, be styled light. But the satirical scourge which the poet here so heedlessly cracks is really a deadly instrument, and the smile that lurks about his lips, as

he wields it, is the sardonic smile of complete disillusion.

## COMPLICATIONS.

In a garden fair grew an apple tree,  
As white with blossoms as white could be.

A bee strayed in from the field of broom ;  
He fell in love with the apple bloom.

Their peace of mind they lost in a trice :  
They now were engaged ; and that was nice.

The bee flew far and returned in the fall :  
His blossom was then a green little ball.

The bee — he mourned, and the green fruit too ;  
But, alas, about that there was nothing to do.

Close by the tree, in the wall of the house,  
Lived a poor but virtuous mouse.

In secret he sighed : “Thou green little ball,  
Oh ! would that I had thee within my wall.”

The bee went roaming — and far led his route ;  
Returned — and then his flower was a fruit.

He grieved in secret ; the fruit grieved too ;  
But, alas, about that there was nothing to do.

Close under the eaves a bird's nest lay,  
Where a sparrow kept house in a humble way.

In secret he sighed : "Thou fruit so fine,  
My nest were heaven if thou wert mine."

The bee, he mourned ; the fruit felt bad ;  
The mousie struggled ; the sparrow was sad :

But each kept quiet, and no one knew,  
For, alas, about that there was nothing to do.

Then dropped the fruit from its bough, and burst ;  
The mouse fell dead, while his fate he curst.

The sparrow at last expired in his hole ;  
When they raised the sheaf on the Christmas pole.

Then the bee was free ; but the leaves were shed :  
And all the flowers of summer were dead.

To his hive he retired, and his trade he plied ;  
An esteemed producer of wax he died.

But spared all this trouble and grief could have been,  
Had the bee been a mouse when the fruit was green.

And all might, perhaps, have ended well,  
Had the mouse been a sparrow before the fruit fell.

It may be parenthetically remarked that a betrothal is a more serious and binding affair in Norway than it is supposed to be in the United States. The bee, when he returned from his travels

and found his flower "a green little ball," would have risked the displeasure of apiarian society and some loss of reputation, if he had repudiated the engagement, on the plea that his *fiancée's* charms had grown a trifle too mature for his taste. The mouse and the sparrow, who were lower down in the social scale, were by that circumstance, as well as by the engagement to the bee, debarred from betraying a sentimental regard; and so the poor flower, ripening into barren fruitage, hung unclaimed, wasting its sweetness on the desert air. It is an every-day tragedy, which becomes the more tragic by the very fact of its commonness. There are, moreover, a variety of pathetic complications in it that will scarcely bear discussion, some of which are dexterously hinted at in these satirical verses.

There is in one little poem, called "Architectural Plans," an unmistakable bit of autobiography which affords some insight into the process of Ibsen's gradual disillusion. Though the "Life," by Jaeger, would lead one to suppose that he was born disgruntled and old, and had never shared the dreams of happy, thoughtless youth, we catch here a glimpse



of a youthful countenance, lighted, in the first two verses at least, by a perfectly normal emotion:—

So plainly I remember that night, without a flaw,  
When blissfully my poem, the first, in print I saw.  
There sat I in my den, and I smoked contentedly,  
And dreamed bright dreams of greatness in blest complacency.

A castle will I build, to blaze forth my grand estate;  
Two wings shall adorn it—one little and one great.  
The large one shall inhabit a bard beyond compare;  
The little one shall shelter a maid of beauty rare.

Methought the scheme transcendent, harmonious, and grand;

But soon confusion reigned in all that I had planned.  
As Master gained in reason, his castle seemed all wrong:  
Too little grew the great wing, the small collapsed ere long.

This does not mean, of course, that he registered a vow to live in celibacy; for the lady for whom he had prepared a bower in the castle of his fame was scarcely of earthly ancestry. She was the feminine romantic element in literature, with which Ibsen had carried on a brief and unprofitable flirtation (*vide* his youthful, unpublished dramas, “St. John’s

Night" and "Olaf Liljekrans"). He had resolved, apparently, to cater to the prevailing taste, which demanded love-stories, more or less disguised — idyllic lies, which have emancipated themselves from all allegiance to the logic of reality. It was a fortunate thing, both for himself and the public, that this wing so soon fell into disrepair, and that the other wing, the great one, which was to accommodate the dominant personality, Henrik Ibsen, was soon found to be too small. For it is himself Ibsen gives us in all his works — his own individual view and judgment of life, and his own trenchant criticism of social conditions. As Goethe polarised his being in Faust and Mephistopheles (both of whom had their germs in his own self), so Ibsen has given us the poles of his soul in "Brand" and "Peer Gynt." To express himself with any degree of completeness, to assert his full right as an individual, he needed all the elbow-room that he had the strength to conquer — and he ended by occupying the whole castle.

There is but a single poem of Ibsen which rejoices in popular favour, viz. "Terje Vigen." This is the story of a Norwegian sailor, who, during the war in the beginning of the century, tried to

break the embargo, rowing in an open boat to Denmark, whence he returns with food for his starving wife and child. He is captured by a young English officer, who laughs at his uncouth speech and gestures of despair. Many years later, when peace has been concluded, Terje is released from his captivity, and establishes himself as a pilot on the Norwegian coast. In a stormy night he boards an English pleasure-yacht in distress, and, recognising in the noble lord, its owner, the naval officer who had mocked his prayers and caused the death of his dear ones by starvation, he abandons the vessel and puts out the life-boat. The lord, his lady, and their little daughter entrust themselves to his care, and he rows them into smooth water. Then, as he reaches the spot where his own cargo of barley was sunk, many years ago, he rises and strikes a hole in the bottom of the boat. It fills rapidly, but is caught on what appears to be a rock, and they stand in two feet of water. The lord cries out, in terror, that the ridge of the rock is giving way and they are sinking, to which Terje replies: "Nay, have no fear! A sunken boat, with three casks of barley is the rock that bears us now."

Then the Englishman remembers the long-forgotten incident, and recognises in the pilot the man he had so wantonly wronged. But just as Terje is about to taste the sweetness of vengeance, the sight of the beautiful child touches his heart, and he cannot fulfil the deed. He brings the nobleman and his family safely to shore, refuses all thanks, and points to the child as their rescuer.

It is not strange that this poem, embodying a situation so powerfully dramatic, should have been seized upon by public readers and declaimers of all degrees. It occupies, in that respect, a position similar to that of Poe's "Raven" with us, and is as direfully familiar. But for all that, it is a splendid piece of narrative verse. Its style is abrupt, gnarled, harsh, and impregnated with the briny smell and the raw chill mists of the northern main.

Far more remarkable and more pregnant with thought is the long poem "On the Highland Plains" (*Paa Vidderne*), which is a *résumé* of all Ibsen's philosophy of renunciation. By the death of every illusion, by the severing of every tie, by the discipline of hardship and pain, is the soul strengthened and purified.

In conclusion, I am tempted to quote a rather rude piece of rhyme, which technically does not rise much above doggerel, but which, for all that, is highly significant. Whether considered as a serious opinion, or as a mere piece of sardonic humour, it furnishes us approximately the measure of its author's radicalism.

TO MY FRIEND, THE REVOLUTIONARY  
ORATOR.

I grown conservative? Friend, you astound me!  
I am the same as ever you found me.

To move the chessmen—what does that avail you?  
Knock the game in a heap—then I shall not fail you.

Of all revolutions, but one I cherish,  
Which was not flimsy and amateurish.

That purged the world for a while of iniquity<sup>1</sup>—  
I refer, of course, to the flood of antiquity.

But then, too, was Lucifer tricked by a traitor;  
Noah outwitted him, turning dictator.

Try it next time more thoroughly; mind not the shriekers;  
But for that we need workers—both fighters and speakers.

*You* raise the wild flood till it rage and roar fearfully;  
*I* will place 'neath the ark the torpedo most cheerfully.

<sup>1</sup> Literally: "That carried off the prize before all others."

If that is a joke (which I do not think it is), it is a grim and uncomfortable one. From the published passages of Ibsen's letters to Dr. Brandes, it appears, however, that he regards the state, and what we call civilisation, as radically wrong, and that he is not without sympathy with those who, by fair means or foul, would abolish it. In a letter of February 17, 1871, he writes :—

“Yes, to be sure, it may be a good thing to possess liberty of suffrage, liberty of taxation, etc., but for whom is it a good thing? For the citizen; not for the individual. But there is no rational necessity why the individual should be a citizen. On the contrary, the state is the banishment of individuality. How has Prussia bought her strength as a state? By the absorption of the individual in the political and geographical conception. The waiter makes the best soldier. On the other hand, look at the Jews—the nobility of humanity. How have they preserved their identity in isolation, in poetry, in spite of all vulgarity? Thereby that they have had no state to drag along with them. If they had remained in Palestine, they would have long since perished in their own construction, like all other



nations. Away with the state! I would like to take a hand in that revolution. Undermine the idea of the state; put in its place free-will and spiritual affinity as the one decisive reason for a union; that would be the beginning of a freedom that would be worth something. Changes in the form of government are nothing but fiddling with degrees — a little more or a little less — fooling altogether — . . . The state has its root in the age; it will have its crown, too, in the age. Greater things than it will perish. . . . Neither our moral conceptions nor our artistic forms have an eternity before them. How much are we really in duty bound to hold on to? Who can afford me a guarantee that up yonder on Jupiter two and two do not make five?"

A doubt which extends even to the axioms of mathematics could scarcely be expected to give any countenance to those of art and morals. It is anarchism pure and simple which Ibsen preaches in the above-quoted letter to Dr. Brandes. And yet it was a foregone conclusion that the only recent practical experiment of anarchy — that of the Paris Commune of 1871 — would disgust him.

"Is it not villanous of the Commune in Paris," he writes to the same friend in May, 1871, "to go and ruin completely for me my excellent theory of the state, or rather of no state! Now that idea is destroyed for long times to come, and I can no more respectably promulgate it even in verse. But, for all that, it is sound at the core, that I perceive plainly enough; and some day it will be put into practice without being caricatured."

Of Ibsen's remaining poems there are many of surpassing interest. His rhymed "Balloon-Letter to a Swedish Lady," dated Dresden, December, 1870, describes a journey up the Nile, and preaches, incidentally, his gospel of individualism, with a delightful epigrammatic incisiveness, *à propos* of the Franco-Prussian War and Von Moltke, who had "murdered the poetry of battle":—

What of these Germanic hosts,  
In their storm-march toward Paris?  
Who stands clear and bright 'mid danger?  
Who himself won victory's prize?  
Where's the hero now, the radiant,  
Whom a million tongues, exalting,  
Bear from home to home in song?  
Nay, the regiment—the squadron,

And the staff—that is, the spy—  
 Like unleashéd packs of hounds,  
 Track the game upon its trail.  
 Therefore perishes the glory.  
 Lo, this chase will find no poet;  
 Only that will live for ages,  
 Which a poet's song exalteth.  
 Fancy, then, the King Gustavus,  
 In the van of Swedish war-hosts;  
 Think of Charles XII. in Bender,  
 Peter Vessel on his frigate,  
 Like a lightning-flash at midnight;  
 And the King-Deep's<sup>1</sup> merry heroes—  
 These has memory fondly clasped;  
 Like a chorus, forth it rolls  
 Their renown in waves of song,  
 'Mid applause of thousand hands,  
 From the gaily garnished tents  
 At a festival of spring-tide.

In reading the slender volume of Ibsen's "Poems," of which the fifth edition appeared in 1886, one is tremendously impressed with the heavy freight of thought which they carry. Very few of them are in any real sense lyrics; for generally speaking, one can scarcely imagine anything more unfit for the accompaniment of a lyre.

<sup>1</sup> The Battle of Copenhagen, April, 1801.

## EMPEROR AND GALILEAN.

IN the drama "Emperor and Galilean" (1873), Ibsen abandoned temporarily the satirical comedy in which he had achieved so distinguished a success, and reverted to a deep philosophical problem which had occupied him since 1864, and which he had incidentally touched upon in "Brand" and "Peer Gynt." It is the problem which Swinburne, lacking the power to grapple with it philosophically, has conceived primarily as a picturesque contrast in the "Hymn to Proserpine," and less pointedly in the "Garden of Proserpine" and "Hesperia."

Thou hast conquered, pale Galilean ;  
The world has grown gray from thy breath,  
We have drunken of things Lethean  
And fed on the fulness of death,

says the English poet, and throughout his melodious chant there runs an undisguised regret at the loss

of "the laurel, the palms, and the pæan, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake."

Ibsen, though being less emotional, is scarcely less alive to the significance of the substitution of the Madonna, the Mother of Sorrow, for Venus, the Mother of Joy.

Not as thine, not as thine was our mother — a blossom  
of flowering seas,

Clothed round with the world's desire as with raiment,  
and fair as the foam

And fleeter than kindled fire, and a goddess and mother  
of Rome.

For thine came pale and a maiden and sister to sorrow,  
but ours

Her deep hair heavily laden with odour and colour of  
flowers,

White rose of the rose, white water, a silver splendour  
aflake,

Bent down unto us that besought her and earth grew  
sweet with her name.

Neither Swinburne nor Ibsen is the first poet who has been impressed with the tremendous reversal of the world's ideals which was implied in its conversion to Christianity.

Paganism, as Schiller has so rapturously sung in

"The Gods of Greece," guided the beautiful world by the gentle leading-strings of joy; while Christianity checked it with the sharp curb of fear, and spurred it on by the hope of heavenly reward. To paganism nature had a certain sanctity; to Christianity nature was accursed. The rebellion of the Emperor Julian against the new ascetic ideal, and his return to the joyous self-indulgence and self-development which the old religion sanctioned, is but symbolic of the poet's own attitude at a certain time of his life. Paganism starved the spirit; Christianity starves the body, is his complaint. Is there no reconciliation possible? Paganism respected the individual, favoured his development, gloried in his eminence. Christianity favours a democratic equality, which in his eyes is destructive of individuality; declares that, whatever our difference, we are all equal before God, and demands renunciation, self-sacrifice, self-obliteration for the common good, instead of enjoyment, cheerful indulgence, self-assertion, and self-confidence. Ibsen had endeavoured to show in "Brand" that the Christian ideal, if consistently realised, ends and must end in destruction; and that men, because of their inability to meet



its heroic demands, consciously or unconsciously strike a compromise, more or less ignoble, in accordance with the power or virtue that is in them.

The rebellion of Julian against Christ is not, however, as the psychological antithesis would seem to require, primarily the protest of the heroic soul, instinct with a sense of indestructible individuality, against the self-effacement which the ascetic ideal demands. Ibsen has, after a careful study of historic documents, endeavoured to depict Julian as he actually was, and he in nowise conceals his failings. Personal vindictiveness and wounded vanity are largely responsible for his virulent hatred of the Christians. His wife, Helen, who was a Christian, had deceived him, and having been poisoned at the command of the Emperor Constantius, she betrays, in the delirium preceding her death, her relation to Gallos, Julian's brother. She heaps contumely upon her husband, contrasting his impotent virtue, his speculative anæmia, with the robust virility of her lover. As, after these terrible revelations, she sinks into the last stupor, Julian clenches his fist and cries wrathfully, "Galilean!"

As the sole motive of Julian's apostasy this

would seem glaringly insufficient ; as a subordinate one, infusing a personal resentment into his philosophic antipathy, it is valuable and significant. His animosity to Christ is intensified by the devotion of His worshippers. Their ardent loyalty and adoration of the hero of their faith becomes to Julian's jealous fancy a robbery from Cæsar. As the drama progresses, this life-and-death conflict, this struggle for supremacy between the Emperor and the Galilean, becomes more heated and desperate. The dominion of the world is at stake in the issue. Julian resolves by persecution utterly to destroy the Christians ; but here the inadequacy of the cheerful philosophy of Plato and Socrates is again demonstrated. Persecution, instead of annihilating Christianity, as Julian had expected, infuses a new life into it. In the past era of imperial protection the faith had become lax ; hypocrisy abounded, and there was imminent danger that the official favour in which the brethren had rejoiced would sap the vigour of the Church. Now Julian, in his effort to stamp out the hateful superstition, arouses again the noble power of endurance and glory in martyrdom, and kindles

in thousands of hearts a flame of pure and lofty enthusiasm. Many who in the times of ease had become recreant returned to the faith, and some whom Julian had tortured thanked him in religious rapture for the torments he had made them suffer for Christ's sake.

The Emperor is baffled, but he does not give up the battle. He begins to perceive, perhaps, wherein the grandeur of the detested religion consists, but the question which is to prevail is now one of vanity and of perseverance, and he lacks the greatness of soul to acknowledge himself conquered. "You call yourselves the disciples of Socrates, of Plato, and Diogenes," he says to his courtiers. "Is there any one of you who would gladly suffer death for Plato's sake? Would our Priskos sacrifice his right hand for Socrates? Would Kytron permit his ear to be cut off for Diogenes? Nay, you would in sooth not. I know you, ye whited sepulchres. Begone from mine eyes! I have no use for you."

"How strange," he continues musingly, "how incomprehensible it is in its deepest cause. . . . With twelve lowly men, fishermen, ignorant people, he founded this."

It is not only by persecuting his followers that Julian strives to overthrow the kingdom of Christ. He makes at the same time the most strenuous efforts to revive the defunct worship of the old gods. Apollo, the radiant sun-god, and Bacchus, the symbol of the eternally creative vernal strength of nature, are his favourite deities, beside Kybele, the Cretan earth-goddess, the bringer of fertility and joy. With an intensity of poetic appreciation he explains and encourages the cheerful worship of these lovely personifications. He rebuilds their temples, and himself leads in the sacrifices. But he has all the time an irrepressible suspicion that the life has long since departed from these nature-gods and that they are dead beyond hope of resurrection. When as a vine-crowned Bacchus, clad in a panther's skin, he rides upon an ass heading the Bacchanalian procession, he is overcome with a positive loathing at its senseless mummeries and shallow artificiality.

"Was there beauty in this?" he exclaims. "Where were the old men with white beards? Where were the pure virgins with filleted brows, with chaste gestures and modest in the midst of

the joy of the dance? Fie on ye, ye harlots! What, then, has become of the beauty? Cannot the Emperor bid it arise and then it will arise? Fie on the stinking dissoluteness! What faces! All the vices cried aloud out of their distorted features. Boils of the body and of the soul. Fie, fie! A bath, Aquilo!"

The *dénouement*, though historically correct, is dramatically weak. Julian, having been mortally wounded in a battle against the Persians, dies with the confession, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean." The same acknowledgment is implied in his dying exclamation, "Sun, Sun, why didst thou deceive me?" But Christianity was not an issue in this war, which was of a purely political character, having been inherited by Julian from his predecessor.

The depth of philosophic meaning which Ibsen has deposited in his drama is far from being exhausted in the above brief *résumé*. The reconciliation of the conflict,—the mythologic dualism,—which is as old as the Aryan race, is not even hinted at. Though Julian was wrong in his warfare against Christ, was there not yet a glimmering of reason on his side? He could not resuscitate



the old beauty, which was no longer beautiful, because it had served its purpose, and its mission could not by any process be prolonged beyond the period when it sprang naturally from the soil and was vitally expressive of the emotions of men. But the new truth, is that to be eternally sufficient? Is it to remain eternally true? Ibsen thinks not. As the first empire of sensuous beauty and joyous indulgence came to its end by the inscrutable process of growth, the arresting of which would mean stagnation and decay, the second empire of ascetic renunciation and the starving of the sense for the benefit of the soul is, according to Ibsen, no more final than was its predecessor. It represents an indispensable stage, but not the goal of human development.

The Mystic Maximos, Julian's revered teacher, who by his oracular sayings largely shapes his actions, announces this in so many words.

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. Both the Emperor and the Galilean shall disappear.

EMPEROR JULIAN. Disappear? Both?

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. Yes, both, whether in our time or in the course of centuries I do not know, but it will come to pass when the right one comes.



EMPEROR JULIAN. And who is the right one?

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. He who shall devour both the Emperor and the Galilean.

EMPEROR JULIAN. Thou solvest the riddle with a still darker riddle.

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. Listen to me, thou friend of truth and brother; I say that they shall both disappear, but not perish. Does not the child disappear in the youth, and the youth in the man? But neither the child nor the youth perishes. Oh, thou my beloved pupil, hast thou forgotten our conversation in Ephesus concerning the three empires?

EMPEROR JULIAN. Ah, Maximos, years have intervened. Speak.

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. Thou knowest I have never approved of that which as Emperor thou hast done. Thou hast tried to turn the youth into a child again. The empire of the flesh, is not the empire of the spirit, but the empire of the spirit is no more final than youth is final. Thou hast endeavoured to prevent the growth of the youth, prevent him from becoming a man. Oh, thou fool, who hast drawn thy sword against that which is to be, against the third empire wherein the dual shall prevail.

EMPEROR JULIAN. And that?

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. The Jews have a name for him. They call him the Messiah, and they are expecting him.

EMPEROR JULIAN (*long drawn and thoughtfully*). The Messiah? neither Emperor nor Redeemer?

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. Both in one, and one in both.

EMPEROR JULIAN. Emperor-God, God-Emperor. Emperor in the realm of spirit, God in that of the flesh.

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. That is the third empire, Julian.

EMPEROR JULIAN. Yes, Maximos, that is the third empire.

It may be concluded that this is a very obscure hint as to what the third empire is to be, but all prophecy is of necessity obscure. What I take it to mean is that in the gradual enfranchisement of humanity which the deeper acquaintance with nature's laws, revealed by science, is to accomplish, the rights of the flesh will be more freely recognised and the antagonism between spirit and flesh, emphasised by St. Paul, will be obliterated in a loving and harmonious union.

As the banqueting scene in the first part, Act III., throws some additional light upon the interesting riddle, I am tempted to quote further. Maximos has summoned the shades of Cain and of Judas Iscariot. Julian addresses to the former the following queries:—

PRINCE JULIAN. Why was I made?

THE VOICE IN THE LIGHT. To serve the spirit.

PRINCE JULIAN. What is my mission?

THE VOICE IN THE LIGHT. Thou shalt confirm the empire.

PRINCE JULIAN. What empire?

THE VOICE IN THE LIGHT. The empire.

PRINCE JULIAN. In what way?

THE VOICE IN THE LIGHT. That of liberty.

PRINCE JULIAN. Speak out fully. What is the way of liberty?

THE VOICE IN THE LIGHT. The way of necessity.

PRINCE JULIAN. By dint of what power?

THE VOICE IN THE LIGHT. By willing.

PRINCE JULIAN. What shall I will?

THE VOICE IN THE LIGHT. What thou must.

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. Hast thou now knowledge?

PRINCE JULIAN. Now least of all. I am suspended over a yawning firmament's deep profound — between light and darkness. (*He lies down.*) What is the empire?

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. There are three empires.

PRINCE JULIAN. Three?

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. First the empire founded on the tree of knowledge, then the empire founded upon the tree of the cross.

PRINCE JULIAN. And the third?

MAXIMOS THE MYSTIC. The third is the empire of the great mystery, — the empire which shall be based upon the tree of knowledge and the tree of the cross united, because it hates and it loves them both; because it has its living sources under Adam's grove and under Golgotha.

The old unfathomable riddle of free will and necessity, of individual self-determination and the divine purpose and over-ruling destiny, is now discussed without, however, shedding any new light upon the hoary mystery. Julian is co-ordinated with Cain and Judas, who, it is contended, were indispensable instruments of the world-will for accomplishing its grand purposes. If Judas was chosen for the terrible work without which the redemption could not have been accomplished and the Scriptures could not have been fulfilled, how was he personally responsible and liable to damnation? So in the case of Julian, he was needed and had his part assigned to him in the vast drama of the evolution of humanity; and, as Maximos phrases it after his pupil's death, the world-will must render an account of Julian's soul.

"Erring human soul," cries the Christian woman, Makrina, over the body of the dead Emperor, "if thou hadst to go astray, it will surely be taken into account on that great day, when the Mighty One shall come in the clouds to pronounce judgment upon the quick that are dead and the dead that are quick."

“Emperor and Galilean” is Ibsen’s largest work, containing two parts of five acts each. It is looser in construction than any of his subsequent dramas, and is occasionally even a trifle prolix in its discussions. Though it was accorded a respectful reception, it was obvious that both the critics and the public were in the dark as to its real meaning.

## THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY.

FROM many utterances of Ibsen, both in public and private, it is obvious that he believes modern society to be in a state of dissolution. He notes on every hand evidences of decay, such as preceded the breaking up of the ancient civilisation and the overthrow of the Western Roman Empire. One of these—and perhaps the most significant—was a hypocritical profession of conformity to customs and beliefs which had long since lost their meaning and vitality. Men publicly professed to believe in gods whom privately they mocked. They pretended to act on the supposition that they possessed a political liberty which *de facto* they had lost. The forms, both religious and political, survived, while the reality which they were meant to express had long since departed.

In "The Pillars of Society," Ibsen has given



us the modern equivalent for this ancient corruption. In a small Norwegian coast town (one naturally thinks of Grimstad, where he spent some laborious years of his youth) the great magnate is Consul Bernick, a rich ship-owner and a very pillar of society. Bernick poses as the model of all civic virtues, and his fellow-citizens take him at his own estimate and hold him to be as noble, disinterested, and public-spirited as his professions. Nothing can prosper in the town without his support; scarcely an opinion can gain currency without his approval. The opening scene, which represents the school-teacher Rörhund reading aloud to a choice circle of the "greatest" ladies of the town, is simply masterly in its terse and restrained satire. I fancy no one who is not acquainted with this touchingly self-conceited, narrow-minded Philistinism can appreciate the admirable veracity and realistic force of each telling phrase. As Thoreau says, "they feebly fabulate and paddle in the social slush." These wretched, cramped, and petty village souls, feeding on scandal as crows on carrion, are simply brimming over with virtuous self-congratulation, while they rend a defenceless rep-

utation to pieces with a lingering satisfaction and ruthless thoroughness. The Norwegians, living as they do, in a corner of the globe, have always felicitated themselves on their remoteness from the great world-life, and their consequent escape from the vices which contaminate and the convulsions which agitate the larger societies. As Mr. Rörlund, the self-constituted guardian of the town's morality, puts it: —

“The superficial rouge and gilding flaunted by the great communities,—what does it really conceal? Hollowness and rottenness, if I may so express myself. They have no moral foundation under their feet. In one word—they are whited sepulchres, these great communities of the modern world. . . . Doubt and fermenting restlessness on every side, the mind unsettled, insincerity everywhere. See how the family is undermined!—how a brazen spirit of destruction is attacking the most vital truths!”

The ladies are immensely edified, of course, to hear “that we ought to thank God that things are as they are with us. A tare, alas! will now and then spring up among the wheat, but we honestly

do our best to weed it out. Our task, ladies, is to keep society pure, to exclude from it all dangerous elements which an impatient age would force upon us."

I remember this kind of talk as vividly as if it were but yesterday that I heard it. Every touch is unerringly correct, every note rings true. Settling, year by year, more deeply into this slough of stagnation, the poor people thank God with Pharisaical unction, because they are not like other men,—not like those poor, benighted Londoners, Parisians, and New Yorkers.

This happy state of affairs continues until the end of the act, when two very unwelcome relatives of Mrs. Bernick return from the United States. The one is Lona Hessel, her half-sister, to whom Bernick had once been engaged; and the other is her brother, John Tönnesen, who, as Bernick's dearest friend, had rescued him from the consequences of a terrible piece of indiscretion, and thereby made his subsequent career possible. For, truth to tell, Bernick had not, in his early years, been the model of virtue which he was reputed to be. A certain actress, Mrs. Dorf (the lady whose

reputation had fared so ill in Mr. Rörlund's circle), had been in the habit of receiving him at unconventional hours ; and being once surprised by her drunken brute of a husband, Bernick had been obliged to make his escape through the window. The affair simply convulsed the town ; and Bernick would have been a ruined man if he had been identified. His friend, John Tönnesen, who was about to embark for America, therefore stepped forward as his substitute, avowing himself the delinquent, and bearing the brunt of the public indignation. As it happened, the house Bernick was then financially unsound. Mrs. Bernick, the Consul's mother, had managed the business badly during her son's absence in Paris, and now he was threatened with bankruptcy. John Tönnesen's sudden departure therefore gave colour to a rumour (which Bernick took care not to contradict) that he had disappeared with a large amount of money ; and creditors, who had at first been importunate, were, under such circumstances, induced to give time. In fact, this rumour enabled Bernick to rehabilitate himself and gradually to meet all obligations.

No wonder that the return of John Tönnesen

causes Bernick uneasiness ; for of this latter rumour John has never had an inkling. And it is at this particular juncture of paramount importance for the Consul to keep his fair name untarnished ; for he has just fathered a great railway enterprise, and in anticipation of its success he has invested his entire fortune in mines, water-power, and lands in the district which is to be benefited by the road. His partners in this scheme are three other social pillars, — Messrs. Rummel, Sandstad, and Vigeland, — each of whom expects his share of the profit, as a reward for concealment, and industrious trumpeting of Bernick's praise. Mr. Vigeland, who is very effectively sketched, is a typical Norwegian village figure. He has an abiding faith in Divine Providence, and makes God a partner in all his shady transactions. Because of his pious airs and scriptural talk he has been nicknamed "Saintly Mike."

By the aid of this worthy triumvirate Bernick has succeeded in preventing the railroad from being laid along the coast, where it would compete with his steamboat line. Far be it from him, however, to profess so sordid a motive. No ; that is just the advantage of having an unassailable reputation,

that you can do mean things with a serene conscience, and no one will dare question your declaration that you have only been actuated by zeal for the public welfare. Thus it is at all events in the case of Bernick. He studiously nurses and bolsters up his reputation as the chief and most indispensable capital in his underhand transactions; and so secure is he in his position that, previous to the arrival of the discredited relatives, no one dares breathe a suspicion against his name.

John Tönnesen has, however, not the remotest intention to unmask his brother-in-law. He is quite willing to endure his unpleasant notoriety (or that part of it which he has voluntarily assumed), and in the most straightforward and generous manner he sets Bernick's fears at rest. But an unforeseen complication arises. John falls in love with Dina Dorf, the daughter of the actress, from whose window he was reputed to have made his escape; and Mr. Rörlund, who is likewise enamoured of the young girl, blurts out the scandalous secret in the presence of both. In his jealous resentment, he makes a clean breast of it, and accuses John to his face of the theft of old Mrs.



Bernick's cash-box. The poor fellow is utterly thunderstruck at the accusation. Receiving confirmation of the rumour from Bernick, he resolves to rehabilitate himself at all risks. When Bernick refuses to clear his honour, and adduces the tremendous interests which just then are at stake, he consents, however, to return to the United States for a few months, at the end of which time he will come back and marry his beloved. It is then his intention to sell his land, realise whatever he can on his transatlantic property, settle down in his native town, and devote the remainder of his life to showing his fellow-townsmen what manner of man he is. He thus confidently expects to compel respect for his character.

Of course, Bernick knows that, if his brother-in-law carries out this plan, he cannot avoid a life-and-death struggle with him. And whichever be the victor, he shudders at the issue of such a conflict. He, therefore, in his dread of impending exposure, resorts to a desperate expedient; or, rather, chance plays into his hand, without any apparent agency of his own. An American ship, named *Indian Girl*, which has been partly wrecked,

is being repaired in his shipyard; but his superintendent Aune refuses to release her, because she is rotten through and through, and utterly unseaworthy. The captain of this ship agrees to take John Tønnesen aboard; and the Consul, seeing a sudden escape from his dilemma, compels Aune, under penalty of discharge, to release *Indian Girl* on the morrow.

While Bernick is trembling with apprehension, and fighting like a beast at bay to preserve his precious reputation, certain rumours have begun to disquiet the town concerning his great land purchases in the district contiguous to the new railway. No one (except his three confederates) suspects Bernick; but discussions of a dangerous character are being started in the local press; and a decisive step is needed to hasten decision before public confidence is shaken. Under these circumstances Messrs. Rummel, Vigeland, and Sandstad organise a great demonstration in Bernick's honour; a torchlight procession of citizens is to bring him their spontaneous homage, and a select committee is to present him with a silver coffee set, as a testimonial of their regard. But as Bernick

(though somewhat unwillingly) is preparing to play his part in this farce, he learns that his only son Olaf, a boy of thirteen, has gone as a stowaway in *Indian Girl*, and that the weather signals along the coast predict a storm. Utterly unnerved as he is by this intelligence, he is presently informed that John Tønnesen has eloped with Dina Dorf, and that, on account of the drunken condition of the American crew, they had embarked in another and perfectly sound ship named *The Palm-Tree*.

“In vain!” he murmurs, overwhelmed and annihilated by the accumulation of disasters.

But it is not, after all, in vain, though the issue does not coincide with the intention. Aune, the superintendent of the shipyard, rather than take upon himself the responsibility for the loss of human life, has detained the *Indian Girl*, and Mrs. Bernick, having concluded from her son's strange conduct that he was intent upon some adventurous plan, had followed him on board the ship, and brought him back. This succession of violent emotions has shaken Bernick deeply; and from the one brief but soul-searching struggle

which it precipitates, he emerges with the resolution to clear his life of all the lies, hypocrisy, and cant under which it has been well-nigh choked.

The procession arrives with music, torches, banners, and flags, and Rörlund, as spokesman for the committee, addresses Bernick as follows:—

“Consul Bernick! I see from the surprise depicted in your countenance that it is as unexpected guests we force ourselves upon you in your happy family circle, at your peaceful hearth, surrounded by upright and public-spirited friends and fellow-citizens. Our excuse is that we obey a heartfelt impulse in bringing you our homage. . . . We have often expressed to you our gratitude for the broad moral basis upon which you have, so to speak, built up our society. . . . You have for many years stood before our town as a shining example. I do not speak of your exemplary domestic life, your spotless moral record. Such things should be left to the closet, not proclaimed upon the house-tops. But I speak of your activity as a citizen as it lies open to the eyes of all. Well-appointed ships sail from your wharves, and fly our flags in the most distant seas. A numerous and happy

body of workmen looks up to you as a father," etc.

After a lengthy enumeration of his other services interlarded with fulsome praise, the speaker finishes with a "Long live Consul Bernick and his fellow-workers! Hurrah for the Pillars of Society!"

Imagine, then, his consternation when Bernick, instead of responding in the regulation terms, deprecating the high honour of which his fellow-citizens have thought him worthy, and declaring that he has been but an humble instrument in the hands of Providence, etc., unveils his real character, acknowledges all the past misconduct, avows his speculative purchases of land and water-power, and reveals the true inwardness of the whole railway enterprise. A painful silence ensues. The citizens steal out one by one, and disappear through the garden. Consul Bernick is left alone with his family. For the first time, upon the new ground of truth, husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister, find each other. Lona Hessel now avows that this clearing away of all the cobwebs of cant and mendacity has been the object of her return from America; and it

appears that she has been the moving spirit in bringing about this happy *dénouement*. It is in acknowledgment of this that Bernick in grateful enthusiasm declares that "women are the pillars of society," to which Miss Hessel replies:—

"No, no; the spirits of Truth and Freedom—these are the Pillars of Society."

Though "The Pillars of Society" is very skillfully constructed and theatrically effective, I confess its ending has always seemed to me unsatisfactory. Character is not changed in an hour, and no emotion, however violent, can make a selfish man an altruist, a mean man noble, a grasping and avaricious man generous. If the vital core and centre of our being were subject to such miraculous transformations, for good as well as for ill (for you could scarcely conceive of the one possibility without the other), no man would seem to be safe in his identity, and education would be an idle mockery. But, happily, except in the plays and novels of romantic authors, such metamorphoses do not occur. It was a favourite device of Dickens to transform the villain, in the last chapter, into a model of virtue, as, for instance, in "Dombey and



Son," where the elder Dombey, after having on the flimsiest grounds denied his daughter the love and sympathy for which she yearned, makes a moral somersault and becomes in the twinkling of an eye the most affectionate of fathers. In Mr. Robert Buchanan's hideous play, "Storm Beaten," we have another and still more glaring example of this sudden metamorphosis, compared with which those of Ovid are as simple and credible as a conjurer's trick. But that Ibsen should be found in this company would, at first blush, seem startling. That he, who is so scrupulous in his adherence to the logic of reality, should have yielded his better judgment to a theatrical exigency, his admirers would be loath to admit. But is there any escape from the conclusion that Bernick would wake up the next morning very much the same Bernick as he was before the moving catastrophe, harbouring, no doubt, some good resolutions, but at heart no more truthful, generous, or honourable than he was before? He had practically (though not *de facto*) been guilty of murder — well-planned and deliberate murder — in ordering the *Indian Girl* to go to sea with his brother-in-law on board, knowing that she

would surely go to the bottom. He had in the course of the four acts developed nearly all the cardinal vices, including profligacy, hypocrisy, dishonesty, and cruel, hard-headed meanness; and yet we are called upon to believe, when the curtain drops upon a happy family scene, lighted up by an emotional blaze of Bengal fire, that to-morrow's sun will rise upon a wholly reformed and transformed character, containing substantial guarantees of happiness to all the members of his domestic circle.

It is very interesting to note the part the United States is made to play in "The Pillars of Society." Judging by the two returned emigrants, John Tønnesen and Lona Hessel, Ibsen fancied this to be a land emancipated from the sway of custom and tradition,—a land where religious prejudice and the spirit of caste are, if not extinct, at all events, comparatively harmless. Thus Martha Bernick, the Consul's sister, exclaims: "Yes, over there it must be beautiful, a wider sky and clouds that sail higher than here; and a freer air blows over the people!"

It is no Utopian account he gives, however, of the life of John and Lona in this land of happy

unconventionality. They both endure hardship; and travel a thorny path not to fortune, but to a mere competence. As a piece of divination, the picture is creditable, and not wide of the mark. It is a trifle made up, perhaps, and lacks local colour of the convincing sort. But after all, there is little need of detail; a mere sun-flushed haze will do, tinged with the colours of the dawn.

The play as a whole is admirably descriptive of the immoral effects of moral tyranny. A small society which endures no non-conformity, and mercilessly crushes out individuality, practically damns its members to a choice between hypocrisy and social ostracism. Nothing is ever forgotten, nothing forgiven.

"In our society," says Consul Bernick, "a youthful indiscretion is never condoned."

As nothing of any consequence ever happens, a choice bit of scandal supplies, as it were, "a long-felt want." It is exhaustively discussed and rediscussed, exaggerated and embellished, until it grows to monstrous proportions. One lost feather becomes six dead hens, as in Hans Christian Andersen's story. Desperate measures of concealment

are therefore dictated by the instincts of self-preservation; open conformity to the social code goes hand in hand with secret violation; hypocrisy and dissimulation become a second nature, and the character, while outwardly resplendent, may be inwardly rotten.

This is the typical "small-town" tragedy, not only in Norway, but throughout the civilised world.



## A DOLL'S HOUSE.

IN "A Doll's House" (1879) Ibsen goes to the bottom of the question: "Is marriage a failure?" or rather, "Why is marriage a failure?" for the failure is apparently taken for granted. As long as women are brought up primarily with a view to pleasing men, their individuality must of necessity be sacrificed. They have to conform to the masculine ideal of womanhood, not to their own ideal as determined by their own endowments, temperament, and character. As long as marriage, in which man is, or at least appears to be, the chooser, is the normal fate of woman, it is difficult to see how this is to be remedied. For men will, of course, choose in accordance with their own ideas (antediluvian though they be) of what is good and pleasing. If the fashion could be reversed, giving women the sole right of proposal, men would be put to the same disadvantage of



having to conform, under penalty of celibacy, to an alien ideal of attractiveness. Men are *naïve*, profoundly simple as compared to women; their cerebral machinery is less involved, less artfully complex. And they would experience far greater difficulty in adapting themselves, or feigning adaptation, to the new and amazing standards of excellence which might then be established. But in the very effort at adaptation, however clumsy, they would become limber, pliable, molluscan; they would lose individuality and lapse into comparative subordination. For such a thing as an absolute equality of the sexes is, under the present social order, an impossibility, and it would be found quite as impossible under the above proposed amendment.

Ibsen's "Doll's House" is a most interesting exposition of this problem. A solution it is not, nor does it profess to be. Ibsen's office, as he has himself said, is to ask questions (and, as a rule, terribly hard ones), but he does not take it upon himself to answer them. He merely lifts the problem into the light of his own luminous contemplation, and exposes all its dangerous intricacies.

The opening scene introduces Helmer, a young lawyer of good position and fair ability, and his wife Nora in a playfully affectionate dispute about Christmas presents and household expenditures. He chides her with all sorts of endearing pet names for her extravagance, laughs at her amusing feminine logic, and treats her as a spoiled child. [She is his "song lark," "his squirrel," "his little sweet tooth," etc., and like most wives, she finds these appellations perfectly natural, and gauges her behaviour accordingly.] The whole scene is admirable, because it is absolutely typical of the relation between a young husband and wife in a civilised family. There is a beautiful moderation in the dialogue which aims simply at truth and shuns caricature. [But the satire is the more scathing] and the gradual unravelling of the tragic elements that lurk in a perfectly normal relation is the more terrifying because of this scrupulous avoidance of high-colouring or overstatement. Nora is the model wife, such as the poets and the masculine ideal of all ages have figured her; she is soft, sweet, impulsive, gentle, pouts when she is crossed, and can be cajoled back into good humour by a

kiss. In fact, she is delightfully feminine. She carries a bag of candy in her pocket, munches *bonsbons* on the sly, and fibs a little when called to account. This trait, to be sure, the poets have omitted, but it is perfectly characteristic of the kind of woman they hold to be adorable. Helmer, though he is no paragon, is exactly the kind of man which maidens and dowagers would unite in declaring most eligible. [He is handsome, good-natured, and well-connected. He treats his wife with half-amused tenderness and a little masculine condescension, indulges her foibles, and fosters the accepted ideal of family life. Nora is, therefore, quite justified in believing that she possesses the prime requisites for happiness, viz. a good husband and a good home.] Being just what society expects a young married woman to be, she has also every reason for being contented with herself. She has the delightful consciousness of being a good wife and a good mother.

The poet now proceeds with a relentless hand to prick each one of these pretty bubbles. A school friend of Nora's, Mrs. Linde, calls upon her, and being a widow without means, desires a posi-

tion in the bank, of which Helmer has just been made a director. In the course of their conversation Nora confides to her how happy she is; and with girlish thoughtlessness brags, in a harmless way, of her own position and achievements. There is something so intensely feminine in this dialogue, something so spontaneous, unforced, and exquisitely self-revealing, that I know of no modern play (except perhaps Emile Augier's "*Le Gendre de M. Poirièr*") in which it can be matched. Not a phrase, nay, not a word, is there which could be dispensed with. The little uneasy vanities about beauty, cleverness, and other personal advantages which are sure to lie hidden in every feminine bosom, untroubled by higher aspirations and larger concerns, put forth their ugly heads, one by one, tentatively, half playfully, and retire out of sight as quickly as they emerged. Nora relates as one of her achievements (which is to match her friend's toil for her mother and brother), that she once saved her husband's life by procuring money to take him to Italy when his health broke down. It turns out that she obtained this money, after having vainly tried to borrow it from her father, by

forging the latter's name to a draft for \$1200; and, as it happened, he died before discovering her crime. A certain disreputable lawyer, Mr. Krogstad, who holds a subordinate position in the bank, detects the forgery, but pays the draft, determining to use his knowledge and the power it gives him over Helmer's wife for his own purposes. Nora has, by deceiving her husband, saved enough money of her weekly allowance for household expenditure to pay the interest and the quarterly deductions as they fall due; and when this did not suffice, she has eked out the required sum by copying legal documents secretly at night. She has received Helmer's promise that he will give Mrs. Linde a place in the bank, and Krogstad, surmising that the new director has determined to discharge him in order to create the desired vacancy, threatens Nora with exposure unless she induces her husband to retain him. She fancies, at first, that he is only trying to frighten her. She had felt so sure of her motives, and plumed herself so on her cleverness, that she cannot be persuaded that her forgery constitutes an offence against the law punishable with prison.

KROGSTAD. You evidently have no clear conception of what that is of which you have been guilty. But I can assure you it was nothing more and nothing worse that made me an outcast from society.

NORA. You? Do you suppose you can make me believe that you ever did anything so courageous, in order to save your wife's life?

KROGSTAD. The laws do not concern themselves with motives.

NORA. Then they must be very poor laws.

KROGSTAD. Whether poor or not, you will be judged in accordance with them, if I produce this paper in court.

NORA. I don't believe that, at all. Do you mean to say that a daughter has not the right to spare her old dying father worries and anxieties? Has a wife no right to save her husband's life? I am not very familiar with the laws; but I am quite sure there must be one among them which makes such a thing permissible. You, who are a lawyer, must certainly know that. You must be a very poor lawyer, Mr. Krogstad.

The next following scene, in which, by diplomatic indirection, she endeavours to sound Helmer on the subject of forgery, is full of quiet, restrained power. I do not mean by power (as most modern dramatists do) violence, but a throbbing intensity of meaning. Every phrase is charged to the full, quivering with the nervous strain of a deeply interesting situation.



*ed  
ews*  
This author does not write to please — particularly not to please the ladies; and I do not blame the ladies for not liking him. And yet, no modern author has a higher conception of womanhood than he, and the lesson he teaches in this very drama is one which women have to take to heart, before they can hope for any real improvement in their position.

Helmer, under the impression that he is talking about Krogstad, soon opens his wife's eyes to the enormity of the offence she has committed. He could have forgiven Krogstad, he says, and retained him in the bank, if he had repented, taken his punishment, and begun a new and clean life. But his underhand ways, his deception, and ineffectual shamming of respectability disgust him and make it impossible for him to breathe the poisoned atmosphere of fraud and lies which surrounds the forger. He must have had a bad mother, he adds, for such defects of character usually are derived from mothers.

NORA. Why — from mothers?

HELMER. Most frequently, at least, from the mothers; but fathers, of course, may have the same effect. That

every lawyer knows. And yet, that fellow Krogstad has for years been coming and going in his own home and poisoned his own children with his hypocrisy. It is therefore I say that he is morally ruined. (*Stretches out his hands toward her.*) Therefore my sweet little Nora must promise me not to speak his cause. Your hand on it!

One happy illusion is here dispelled. She is not the model wife she had fancied herself. The idea that she is in the very same predicament as the despised Krogstad; that, having resorted to the same desperate lies and deceptions, she poisons the atmosphere of her home and contaminates her children, makes a terrible impression upon her.

[The happiness of home is lost. For how can a guilt-burdened soul feel, or even feign, happiness? She yet clings, however, to her illusion concerning her husband. She is sure that he is good, noble, manly.]

But in the next act, he, too, reveals himself as he really is, and her second illusion is shattered. She importunes him not to dismiss Krogstad, using persuasion and all the feminine arts at her disposal. She knows that, if she can only tune him into an amorous mood, she can usually wheedle him into

acquiescence in her wishes. But this time she fails. Helmer, to cut discussion short, despatches the letter discharging Krogstad from his position.

In the meanwhile, Dr. Rank, a rich bachelor and an intimate friend of the family, arrives, and Nora, after some squirming, resolves to borrow money of him, to satisfy Krogstad's claim. For she is under the impression that if but the last instalment of the debt is paid off, the compromising document will be recovered and destroyed. In her desperate strait, having no time to lose, she tries the same questionable arts on Dr. Rank, which so often had brought her husband to her feet; and the doctor, being a man of few scruples, promptly responds with a declaration of love. In utter disgust, Nora turns from him, without having broached the momentous question.

Krogstad, in the meanwhile, presses his claim, and writes a letter to Helmer, informing him of his wife's crime. In order to prevent him from reading this letter, which has been dropped into his private mail-box, Nora again employs the most desperate expedients. She cajoles and amuses him, performing for him a tarantella in the costume of

a Capri fishermaid, and finally makes a sensation at a masquerade, to which they have been invited, by her beauty and the magnificent abandon of her dancing. In the middle of the night, when they return from the ball, Helmer retires to his study and reads the fatal epistle. [Nora has first resolved to kill herself; but it suddenly dawns upon her that, perhaps, the calamity may be a blessing in disguise.] It will afford Helmer a magnificent opportunity to demonstrate his love for her by shielding her and taking her crime and its consequences upon himself. This is "the wondrous thing" which, in her romantic delusion, she is tremulously expecting.

But, instead of that, Helmer loses his temper and furiously upbraids her. He calls her a liar and a hypocrite, a worthy daughter of a dishonest father. He declares her to be unfit for the education of her children, and laments his own ill-fortune in being wedded to such a wife. He is bent only upon shielding himself, not her. He will still keep her under his roof, he says, in order to save appearances and avoid a vulgar scandal. But of happiness there can no longer be any question. While

he is in the midst of this tirade, a messenger arrives from Krogstad, who has been induced by Mrs. Linde (the love of his youth) to return the compromising document. Instantly Helmer's indignation evaporates, and, with a profound sense of relief, he flings the draft and the letter into the fire. With characteristic masculine obtuseness, he fancies that the episode now is closed. He approaches his wife, tries clumsily to retract what he has been saying, and to coax her back into good humour. But in this he signally fails. [Nora has now no illusions left. She has seen him as he is, and discovered how little he resembles the ideal of him which she has cherished. The edifice of her happiness has been shaken in its foundation, and, like a house of cards, it comes tumbling down about her ears. It was a mere doll-house, after all, in which her husband, her children, and herself had been playing at happiness.] Never had they spoken a serious word to each other in the eight years of their married life. It had all been song and play, petting, cajoling, and thoughtless mirth.

HELMER. How preposterous and ungrateful you are, Nora! Have you not been happy here?

NORA. No, never. I fancied I was ; but I was not.

HELMER. Not — not happy !

NORA. No ; only merry. You have always been good to me, but our home has never been anything but a play-house. I have been your doll-wife, as, at home, I was papa's doll-child, and our children in turn have been my dolls. I thought it was so amusing when you played with me ; just as they thought it amusing when I played with them. That has been our wedded life, Torvald.

HELMER. There is some truth in what you say, however exaggerated and overstrained it may be, but from this time forth it shall be different. The time for play is past, and now comes the time for education.

NORA. Whose education ? Mine, or that of the children ?

HELMER. Both yours and the children's, my beloved Nora.

NORA. Ah, Torvald, you are not the man to educate me into a proper wife for you.

HELMER. And that you tell me ?

NORA. And I — how am I qualified to educate our children ?

HELMER. Nora !

NORA. Did not you yourself, a little while ago, declare that that task you did not dare entrust to me ?

HELMER. In an angry moment ! How can you pay any attention to that ?



NORA. Because you spoke truly. I am not fit for that task. There is another task which first must occupy me. I must try to educate myself. You are not the man to help me in that work. I must accomplish it alone; and, therefore, I must now leave you.

With the succinct declaration (so profoundly characteristic of Ibsen) that her first duty "is not to her husband and children," but to herself, Nora goes forth into the world, breaking the ties of nature and affection, in order to test the educational virtue of life and thereby rise into true womanhood.

But why could she not have done that at home? the reader will ask. Because, the poet would answer, her relations to Helmer were such that she never could rely upon her own unassisted power as long as he stood at her side. The discipline of renunciation, privation, and pain, which can alone steel a character, she could never experience in a luxurious home, where her every want was satisfied and where she was shielded from contact with all the harsher phases of existence. The other question which naturally arises is this: Did she need this discipline? Was she right in throwing off the

responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood for the sake of furthering her own development? Ibsen is obviously of opinion that she was.

The whole play is written with a view to creating the situation which demands this categorical choice. Nora is not, in her present state, an individual; she is merely the crude human material out of which, in time, by the wholesome trials and struggles of life, an individual of some potency may or may not be evolved. It was not primarily Helmer's selfishness and conceit which wrecked the marriage, but it was Nora's undeveloped condition — her lack of character. And how, forsooth, was she to have acquired a character of any force and sturdiness amid the conditions which had from infancy surrounded her? Her father, we hear, had coddled her and played with her, and her husband had continued the same agreeable pastime. Never had she heard a serious word from anybody. Never had she, like a boy, been permitted to make acquaintance with life at first hand. The books she had been allowed to read had probably been of the harmless, namby-pamby kind which are written especially for young girls, and designed to conceal

or expurgate reality for their benefit, and reduce all existence to a pleasant, rose-coloured lie. With such an education, how could she be anything but what she is — a flimsy, ignorant, affectionate, ill-regulated little girl, in the midst of her wifeness and motherhood? Ibsen has by a series of unobtrusive but admirably telling touches drawn her portrait, which for veracity and delicate distinctness of modelling is unrivalled in his whole gallery.

[ It is immaturity, then, not depravity, which makes Nora unfit for the education of her children. Because immaturity can be remedied by education, ] she is, the poet thinks, justified in seeking this remedy where alone it is to be found. Her perpetual lying, for instance, which is the heedless and irresponsible mendacity of a child; her inability to forecast the results of her actions; her munching of candy, etc., are all meant as symptoms of immaturity. No intelligent and capable woman, with a serious view of life, goes about with a pocket full of candy, or is severely tempted by the display of *bonbons* in a confectioner's window. It is little girls in their teens who hanker for sweets; or women whose souls are yet in their teens, whatever their bodies

may be. But the forgery, you will say, does not that indicate depravity? I think not. Ibsen makes it plainly evident that it was committed with no criminal intent, from motives which were, on the whole, laudable, and with the haziest ideas of what it really meant. [No more than we would hold a child fully accountable for a misdemeanour which comes within the reach of the law, can we argue depravity of character on the part of a woman who, from mistaken affection, has been kept in ignorance concerning the society in which she lives, and the institutions, legal and political, which limit and restrain its members.

Because she lacks moral consciousness (except of a rudimentary kind) and that degree of maturity upon which responsibility can be fastened, the poet's censure falls not upon her, but upon her husband and father, who, by holding her apart from the reality of life, have conspired to check her normal growth and keep her in an unnatural state of tutelage. This is a remnant from the barbaric ages, when women, in order to guard their purity, were shut up in harems and jealously watched by eunuchs. Even with the modification which the later centuries

have effected in their condition, they are yet but half free, because we are all yet half subject to the antiquated ideals which we have inherited. Every child, whether male or female, that comes into the world, has, abstractly speaking, a full right to know the life into which it is born, to test its educational value, and by its rough and trying discipline to develop whatever powers there may be slumbering in it.

You cannot artificially limit experience, without impairing growth, diminishing the chances of survival, and stunting the stature of manhood or womanhood. Nevertheless, all development must be based on the past, must be normal and gradual. There can be no leaps, without risk of slips by which more is lost than gained. [We may be impatient of the slow evolution of social conditions, but we cannot greatly anticipate it, however much we may strive. All that a keen and radical thinker like Ibsen can do is to stimulate thought and arouse sentiments which may guide and hasten the development in the desired direction.]

As an exposition of the psychology of marriage, "A Doll's House" suffers, however, in my opinion,

from an obvious defect. Though the characters and their relation are sufficiently typical, forgery is so exceptional a crime among ladies of good position as almost to invalidate the whole moral of the drama. If Ibsen could have based his intrigue upon an experience which lay, not only within the range of possibility, but of probability, and normally growing out of such a marriage as he has described, he would have preached a lesson of far more general applicability. But even making this deduction, we cannot deny that he has put his finger on the morbid spot from which nine-tenths of all marital suffering and infelicity proceed.

There are a great many things in life which most of us know to be wrong, but concerning which we have agreed to be silent, because there is no attainable remedy in sight. We all know that there is a vast deal of conventional blinking, not because we do not see, but because we dare not see. Ibsen has the uncomfortable habit of saying these very things which in our conspiracy of silence we have agreed to ignore, and of thrusting into view the things which in our conspiracy of blindness we have concluded to keep dark. He holds aloft a search-



light of great illuminating power, and pitilessly exposes the unsound and rotten places in the social structure. Nay, even where we have perhaps prided ourselves on the excellence of our workmanship, he is apt to detect dangerous settlings and cracks in the foundation stones.

## GHOSTS.

"GHOSTS" is the reverse of the problem of which "A Doll's House" is the obverse. A hundred critics cried out at the immorality of the *dénouement* of the latter play, declaring it to be subversive of matrimony, which is the head of the corner in the social structure. "Ghosts" is Ibsen's reply to these guardians of morality. "If, instead of leaving her husband and children, Nora had remained," he says in substance, "this is what might have happened." The two situations are, to be sure, not exactly parallel; for Helmer, though a pig-headed, narrow-visioned man, was not dissipated; and, in order to make the reply adequate, we have to supply some intermediate stage of unfavourable development on his part, induced, perhaps, by his marital infelicity. However, that is of minor consequence. As it was not Ibsen's intention to write a sequel to "A Doll's House," he could not,

of course, re-introduce the same characters. But the close relationship of the one play to the other is nevertheless obvious.

"Ghosts" is the most radical, the most revolutionary, document which the literature of the nineteenth century has to show. It undertakes to investigate the foundations of the accepted morality, and finds them to be weather-worn, sagged, and out of plumb. It may, perhaps, be worth while, from time to time, to make such an investigation; but (as is the case with all investigations) the result depends largely upon the spirit in which it is undertaken. Though I admit that there is considerable force in Ibsen's indictment, which is calculated to confute the conventional arguments, there is nevertheless a flaw in it, for it attempts to prove more than is warranted by its premises. That the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation, and that such visitation involves injustice to the children, we may readily concede, without going to the length that Mrs. Alving does, who declares that the moment she begins to pick at a little knot the whole fabric

of morality unravels in her hands. The fundamental problem, however, in the last instance, is that "tough morsel" which Mephisto in "Faust" asserted that he had been chewing for many a thousand years, and which "no man, from the cradle to the grave, will ever digest," viz. that of free will and divine omnipotence, — individual responsibility and over-ruling law.

The habit of praise and censure presupposes some degree of personal accountability. Mrs. Alving, fearing the reprobation of the community, and wishing to bequeath an honourable name to her son, conceals her husband's debaucheries, straining every nerve to preserve the respectability of the family. The outcome of the drama is, however, to prove by a truly ferocious logic that in this endeavour she was wrong. The Chamberlain, her husband, was a joyous, vigorous, full-blooded nature, strapped in a strait-jacket of puritanic morality; and his transgressions, though they destroyed him, were the inevitable and legitimate results of his character and environment. Therefore, she concludes, she had no right to conceal, far less to place obstacles in the way of, his marital infidelity

and his convivial excesses. But, though there is a show of logic in this conclusion, is not the fact that the vices which Mr. Alving practised destroyed him, sufficient evidence that they are, from Nature's point of view, not legitimate? For some reason, she chooses to perpetuate only the temperate, self-restrained man who has his passions and desires under control. The joyous man who, from excessive exuberance of spirits, gets drunk (though he is a perfectly intelligible phenomenon), and the full-blooded man who, from excess of physical vigour, finds himself unable to conform to the seventh commandment, she has apparently no use for; and she chooses to eliminate them in the course of a few generations, or she induces them, under the impression that they are having a royal good time, to eliminate themselves, to diminish and squander their vital capital, until, like any other bankrupt, they are hustled out of court, lapse into obscurity, and are trampled down.

It would be easy to frame no end of sentimental objections to this process, which, nevertheless, is in the main, merciful and conducive to the greatest good of humanity. You might say, what few would

now deny, that the ghosts of our barbarous ancestors haunt our spirits and lurk in our flesh, manifesting themselves in lawless impulses and savage desires; and that accordingly we are not accountable for actions thus prenataally determined. But what is gained by such an argument? Practically nothing, except to arouse a greater compassion for the offender, and a more lenient judgment. But Ibsen, as far as I can judge, goes farther, and endeavours by a dangerous sophistry to blot out the boundary between good and evil. His whole reasoning, as embodied in Mrs. Alving, leaves a large and importunate interrogation mark in our minds as to whether goodness, in the accepted sense, is particularly laudable, and, on the whole, to be preferred to badness. In propounding this query, and employing all his ingenuity and brilliant dialectics in its exposition, Ibsen is, or endeavours to be, strictly impartial, aiming to get at the truth in whatever unexpected place it may prove to be hidden.

To me, I confess, such impartiality is direfully reprehensible. If an author does not choose to ally himself with "that force not ourselves which makes for righteousness," he allies himself whether



he would or not with the Mephistophelian force of disintegration and destruction. He is, like Faust's companion, "a son of chaos," and lands us in moral anarchy. I have no quarrel with him for refusing to accept the ethics of the Decalogue as revealed, but he is surely not blind to the fact that these ten commandments are the most precious results of the world's long discipline of blood and woe, and embody the forces which have led the race out of barbarism and built up civilisation. As such they must, whatever hardships they entail upon the individual transgressor, be accounted good, and the line of conduct which conforms to them laudable; while the violation of them must be accounted bad, and the conduct which infringes them reprehensible. If the time is ever to come when they may be dispensed with, it will be in that altruistic millennium which Herbert Spencer has prophesied, when the last remnants of our barbaric past shall have been expunged from our souls, and every ghost that haunted the chambers of our hearts shall have been banished forever.

In his efforts to befog these fundamental notions of right and wrong, Ibsen reminds one of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who likewise repudiated civil-

isation (and with a good deal more justification than Ibsen), and longed for the blissful anarchy of the pure state of nature. One almost wishes that he might have been taken at his word, and transferred back a score of centuries into the hypothetical felicity of the stone or the bronze age. If Ibsen, like the Councillor in Hans Christian Andersen's "Goloshes of Fortune," could have a little taste of his own lawless, rulerless, and stateless condition, I fancy his career as a prophet of anarchy would come to an abrupt end.

The plot of "Ghosts" is briefly as follows:—

Mrs. Alving, the widow of the late Captain and Chamberlain Alving, has spent her life in building up a fictitious reputation for probity and moral excellence for her profligate husband. And now, to crown her work, she has erected and endowed a large orphan asylum, which is to bear the name of the deceased, and, as it were, advertise his virtues to all the world. In this pious endeavour she has succeeded beyond expectation, and she is disposed to congratulate herself on the self-sacrifice and martyrdom of the many hideous years she has shared with the brutal reprobate. She had, to be

sure, once rebelled, and, in her detestation of the Captain's vices, sought a refuge in the house of the Reverend Mr. Manders, who had loved her in her girlhood, and whom she had loved. But the pastor refused to receive her, and in impressive words persuaded her to return to her husband, take up her cross and meekly bear it. In due time a son is born to her, but, in order to conceal from him his father's degradation, she sends him away from home when he is but a few years old. He grows up in Paris, and becomes an artist of much promise. Now, when the Chamberlain is dead, she yearns for the sight of Oswald, and induces him to spend the winter in his home. It is her purpose to be done, once for all, with her husband and all that appertains to him, and to begin a new and happy life with her son. Every penny that Mr. Alving had left her she has set apart for the endowment of the asylum; and every memory which he has bequeathed her she strives resolutely to banish. She stoutly persuades herself that Oswald takes after her, and she is shocked when Pastor Manders exclaims at his resemblance to his father. Oswald is, however, soon to justify the pastor's remark.

He promptly reveals the same propensities which wrecked his father's life; and his mother sees the whole beautiful structure which her maternal hope had built collapse at a breath, like a house of cards. The asylum, which the pastor had dissuaded her from insuring, lest she show distrust of Divine Providence, is burned, and all her fond calculations are rudely overthrown. It is the dead man's ghost, which, refusing to be laid, walks abroad in her life, trailing behind it a long train of calamities.

Terrible, in spite of its reticence, is the scene where Oswald confesses that he is afflicted with a strange disease which for long periods incapacitates him for work and causes him horrible pains in the head. The Parisian physician whom he had consulted had said that there had been something worm-eaten about him from his very birth; and he had added significantly that the sins of the father are visited upon the children. The young man had indignantly denied this imputation, and in order to convince the leech, translated certain passages of his mother's letters relating to his father. The doctor had then given him the alternative of believing that it was his own youthful indiscretions which

had sapped his strength and ruined his life. That he was hopelessly lost he well knew, and the fate which stared him in the face, out of the dark future, was madness and torturing misery. In order to escape this fate, he carried in his pocket a morphine powder which he meant to take when he saw the Furies approaching; and he implores his mother, by the love she bears him, to give it to him, in case they should clutch him so suddenly as to deprive him of his power to act.

All this is revolting, of course, horribly revolting. A situation is here devised which would seem to justify a mother in taking her son's life. The dreadful interrogation mark is there again; and a chill, insidious doubt steals into the reader's mind, as to the legitimacy of all inherited morals. They need testing in the seams, apparently; and that is the task to which Ibsen has applied himself. It is an extremely tangled web he has woven; and neither warp nor woof runs straight according to the traditional pattern. A few examples will suffice. The pastor who drove Mrs. Alving, with the scourge of duty, back into the arms of her profligate husband, is responsible for Oswald's existence. The



child, whose whole life has been an expiation of his father's sins, would never have been born, if his mother had been sustained in the first revolt of her womanhood against the degradation to which her marriage had doomed her. The query arises: was the pastor right in denying his love and his humanity and pitilessly enforcing the biblical command? Ibsen has no hesitation in declaring that it was a crime.

Again, the commandment bids the son to honour his father and his mother; and Mrs. Alving, mindful of this duty, has embellished her husband, in her letters to Oswald, with fictitious virtues. Believing his mother's words, the young man has no choice but to conclude that he is himself responsible for his misery, until the torture which this thought causes him moves Mrs. Alving's pity, and she exposes the dead in all his hideousness. Ibsen is, apparently, of opinion that he has proved the absurdity of the fifth commandment, in showing that there are cases in which it does not apply. But because a son cannot be expected to honour, far less to love, a father whom he has scarcely known, and who is a vicious reprobate to boot, are children henceforth



to be absolved from the duty to honour their parents? I am unable to persuade myself that so acute an intellect as Ibsen can believe that, in devising a glaring exception, he has invalidated the rule. And yet this seems to be a method which he has pursued in all his attempts to break down the code of traditional ethics. At the bottom of his revolt is the old antithesis (which is so deeply expounded in "Emperor and Galilean") between the pagan joy of life and the Christian renunciation. What is crying out in the soul of Mrs. Alving is the same deep heart-hunger for joy which made the tragedy of the Emperor Julian's life; and Pastor Manders is a tempered, much modernised embodiment of the gospel of renunciation.

The tragic *dénouement* approaches with relentless necessity. At the burning of the asylum Oswald over-exerts himself, and on coming home is distracted and bewildered. The symptoms of the disease which the French physician had predicted, declare themselves, and his mother, who has hoped against hope, sees him hovering on the verge of madness, and then lapsing into helpless imbecility.

To all her terrified questions and exclamations he only mutters: "The sun, the sun—give me the sun." In speechless horror she stands staring at him, clutching the morphine powder in her hand; whereupon the curtain falls.



## AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE.

AN author spins his web like the spider, out of his own self. Each of Ibsen's plays chronicles his soul life during a certain period. Each bears a certain relationship to its predecessors and its successors ; and frequently owes its origin to some idea prompted by the former, and engenders the parent thought from which the latter springs. Thus "An Enemy of the People" is a fresh variation of the theme of "Brand." It is "Brand" in a lower key, "Brand" stripped of all heroics. Doctor Stockmann makes Brand's fight for the ideal on a smaller and less resonant stage ; and expresses in the end, in less sonorous phrases, Brand's contempt for the multitude.

In a more external sense, it was the reception accorded to "Ghosts," which gave the first impetus to the writing of "An Enemy of the People." Since the publication of "Love's Comedy," Ibsen

had had comparatively smooth sailing ; and no squall had overtaken him, until he conjured up those uncomfortable ancestral "Ghosts" which had been hidden in the darkest family closets, and until then had never been made to stalk abroad in the daylight. Though the Norwegian journals were far from rivalling the English in choice vituperation,<sup>1</sup> they were, as might have been expected, terribly scandalised, and not particular about the weapons they employed against this outspoken anarchist, this enemy of the social order. Old and forgotten slanders were revived, and new ones invented calculated to neutralise the attack and make the assailant harmless. Philippics, tremulous with moral indignation, were hurled at the poet ; and some of the very means described in the play were resorted to in order to deter him from persevering in his dangerous activity.

It is easy to see how this situation suggested the strictly parallel one of Dr. Stockmann. Ibsen had endeavoured to demonstrate that the moral sources of society were poisoned and corrupt ; his repre-

<sup>1</sup>*Vide* G. Bernard Shaw, "The Quintessence of Ibsenism," pp. 93, 94.

sentative in the play makes the same discovery in regard to the water-supply of the town of which he is an inhabitant. A medicinal spring and the establishment of a bathing-cure cause a large influx of strangers into the sleepy old place, which thereby experiences a sudden prosperity. All the people are, more or less, dependent upon the bathing guests for their living; most of all Dr. Stockmann himself, who is the superintending physician of the baths. During his practice in this capacity several of his patients develop typhoid symptoms which he can in nowise account for, until it occurs to him to have a chemical analysis made of the water. He then learns that the healing springs are contaminated by contact with sewage and the drainage from the tanneries belonging to his father-in-law, Morten Kiil. He felicitates himself greatly upon this discovery, which he is eager to communicate to the proper authorities, so that they may make haste to remedy the evil. But unhappily his brother, the Mayor, is responsible for the laying of the water-works where they are; and he regards the Doctor's reflection upon the water as a personal reflection upon himself. Moreover, he is so constituted that he cannot



be persuaded to support any movement which he has not himself originated, or appeared to originate. Accordingly, he begs his brother to retract, and, on his refusal, threatens him with dismissal from his post. The proposed re-laying of the water-pipes would cost several hundred thousand kroner, to defray which would necessitate an increase of taxation. Moreover, fully two years would be required to obviate the engineering difficulties which the scheme would present; and during this time the baths would have to be abandoned. It is in vain that the Doctor proclaims the iniquity of exposing credulous patients in search of health to the certainty of disease and death, and extorting money from them under false pretences. The Mayor sees a means of increasing his own popularity by discrediting his brother's discovery, and espousing the cause of the oppressed tax-payers; for it must be clear to any man of common sense that, where uprightness is so ruinously expensive, it ought not to be encouraged, regardless of consequences.

Having met with this rebuff where he least expected it, Dr. Stockmann resolves to appeal to public opinion through the press, and anticipates

an easy victory. The editor of *The People's Messenger*, Mr. Hovstad, is eager to get a whack at the Mayor and the oligarchic little clique of officials who manage local affairs; and the printer of the paper (the same Aslaksen whom we encountered in "The League of Youth") sees a chance of gaining prominence by identifying himself with a cause of such importance to the welfare of the city. He promises the Doctor to work up a sentiment in his favour among the small citizens, and assures him that he will soon have the compact majority on his side. No sooner has the Doctor taken his leave, however, than the Mayor arrives by the back stairway, flatters Aslaksen, and calls his attention to the enormous cost of the proposed undertaking. The small tax-payers will surely think twice before assuming so heavy a burden. In fact, it dawns upon the printer that a greater advantage is to be gained by siding with the Mayor; and Mr. Hovstad, who begins to scent unpopularity and loss of subscribers in the Doctor's manuscript, refuses him the use of his columns. There is nothing then for the reformer to do but to hire a hall and invite his fellow-citizens to listen

to his plea and weigh his argument without prejudice. But the Mayor, who is afraid of this argument, is resolved to suppress it. And he easily outgenerals his candid and undiplomatic brother. Contrary to the latter's wish, a chairman is elected, and the choice falls upon Aslaksen, whom the Mayor nominates. The prearranged programme is then forced through. The assembly votes to forbid the speaker to refer to the baths and the condition of the water-supply, because it is contrary to the interests of the city to give publicity to such damaging allegations. The Doctor's indignant protest is drowned by fish-horns, hisses, and yells. Having striven in vain to get a hearing, he is compelled to accept the terms which the crowd impose upon him. He promises to speak on another subject. And now follows a tremendous arraignment of democracy and so-called "popular institutions," which is written out of the depth of Ibsen's heart.<sup>1</sup> I can recall no passage in which he so unreservedly removes his mask

<sup>1</sup> I remember having a conversation with Ibsen in Dresden in October or November, 1873, in which he uttered the very opinions here attributed to Dr. Stockmann.

and lets his own voice ring through that of his *dramatis persona*. Every one of the following sentences is stamped with the image and likeness of Henrik Ibsen ;—

“The most dangerous foes of truth and liberty among us is the compact majority. . . . The majority have never the right on their side. Never, I say. That is one of those social lies against which a free-thinking man must revolt. Who is it that constitutes the majority among the inhabitants of this country? Is it the wise folk or the fools? I think we might easily agree that it is the fools who are at present in an overwhelming majority everywhere in this wide world. But it can never in all eternity be right that the fools should govern the wise! . . . The majority have the might, alas; but the right they have not. I am right, and a few others are. . . . The minority is always right. . . . I will waste no words on the little narrow-chested, short-breathed band who are behind the times. With them the pulsating life has no longer anything to do. But I am thinking of those few among us who have made all the young germinating truths their own. These

men stand, as it were, out among the outposts, so far forward that the compact majority have not reached thither; and there they fight for truths which are yet too new-born in the world of consciousness to have gained the adhesion of the plurality. . . . I intend to start a revolution against the lie that it is the majority who have the truth in their keeping. What kind of truths is it about which the majority are apt to flock? It is those truths which are so aged that they are on the point of becoming decrepit. For when a truth has grown so old, it is in a fair way of becoming a lie, gentlemen. . . . Truths are not such long-lived Methuselahs as people are apt to fancy. A normally constituted truth lives, as a rule, seventeen to eighteen, or, at most, twenty years; rarely longer. But such ancient truths are always frightfully lean. Nevertheless it is not until then that the majority takes hold of them and recommends them to society as wholesome spiritual food. But there is not much nutritive value in that kind of fare, I assure you. . . . The truths which the crowd, the multitude, accept are the very ones which the vanguard held to be sure

ones in the days of our grandparents. . . . There is a doctrine which you have inherited from your forefathers, and which thoughtlessly you proclaim far and wide; and that is that the common people, the herd, the multitude, are the nation's core; that they are the people, properly speaking; that the commoners, these unenlightened, unfinished folk in a community, have the same right to condemn and approve, to rule and govern, as the few personalities of spiritual gentility. . . . The common herd are only the raw material out of which a people is to be made. Yes, is it not thus in all the rest of the living world? What a difference there is between a high-bred and a low-bred species in the animal world! . . . Take first a plain common dog,—let us say, a nasty, frowsy, plebeian cur which runs along the gutter and befouls the house-walls. And place this cur side by side with a poodle whose race for several generations has been reared in a genteel house, where it has had dainty food, and had occasion to hear harmonious voices and music. Aren't you aware that the cranium of that poodle is quite otherwise developed than that of the cur? Well, you may be



sure it is. It is such high-bred puppies that the jugglers train to perform the most incredible tricks. Such things a common plebeian cur could never learn, if it stood on its head. . . . It is indefensible, on the part of *The People's Messenger*, to proclaim day after day the falsehood that it is the herd, the multitude, the compact majority, which possess love of freedom and morality; and that vice and corruption and all kinds of spiritual nastiness are things which ooze out of culture, as all sorts of foulness ooze from the tanneries in the Mill Valley down to the baths. . . . And in spite of that, this same *People's Messenger* can preach about raising the multitude to higher conditions of life; . . . but if *The People's Messenger* were consistent, that would be the same thing as to pitch it right to destruction. But happily it is only an old inherited lie that culture is demoralising. No, it is stultification, poverty, ugliness in daily surroundings, which does the devil's work. In a house which is not aired and swept daily . . . people lose in three or four years the faculty to think and act morally. Lack of oxygen debilitates the conscience. And there must be a dire lack

of oxygen in many houses in this city, when the compact majority can be unscrupulous enough to be willing to build the prosperity of the town upon a bog of lies and deceit."


Such language is more than the compact majority may be expected to endure; and after having passed a resolution declaring Dr. Stockmann to be an enemy of the people, the meeting breaks up in great disorder. The mob follows him through the streets, hooting and yelling, and finally, when he seeks refuge in his house, smash the windows with a shower of stones. The persecuted man gathers his family about him in his ruined home and declares his intention to emigrate to the United States, although by preference he would "buy a primeval forest, or a small island in the Pacific, if it could be had on cheap terms."

Dr. Stockmann has, however, not yet sounded the depth of baseness which the human heart can hold. His father-in-law, Morten Kiil, an eccentric old gentleman, conceives the idea of muzzling him, which he does not doubt will prove effective. He invests that portion of his property which Mrs. Stockmann was to inherit in the shares of the

bathing-company, in order thereby to appeal to his son-in-law's self-interest, and make him desist from further depressing the shares by damaging revelations. He then informs the zealous reformer that the fate of his family is in his own hands. Presently the Mayor arrives, and makes a second attempt to extort from the Doctor a recantation of his opinion concerning the water. Mr. Hovstad, the editor, who has heard of Kiil's stock transaction, finds in this a sudden clew to the mystery of Stockmann's conduct. The Doctor is, of course, in league with his father-in-law, and the two have resolved to "bear" the stock until they have bought a sufficient amount to insure the control of the company. The probability is that they have succeeded in this scheme; in which case Mr. Hovstad cannot afford to incur their ill-will. Now he comes with Mr. Aslaksen, anxious to obliterate the impression which his cowardly behaviour must have made at the public meeting. Just as the Mayor had fancied that his brother's object was to ingratiate himself with Kiil by injuring the official clique, Mr. Hovstad attributes to him the still lower motive of financial gain. And on the

whole, the editor feels no indignation at the turpitude of such double dealing, but with an eye single to his own interest, tries to strike a bargain whereby he may himself profit by the Doctor's iniquity. Not even when the latter, in his wrath, assaults him with an umbrella, does he quite comprehend wherein he has offended.

These episodes at last open Stockmann's eyes to the real condition of the society in which he lives, and he resolves, instead of shaking its dust from his feet, to remain and fight his fight to the bitter end. Though he has been deprived of his livelihood, though his landlord has given him notice to leave, though his daughter Petra has lost her position, and his children have been "requested" to quit the school they are attending, all in deference to public opinion, he determines to stand his ground and be a solitary voice of truth crying in the wilderness. Now that he has emancipated himself from his citizenship, with all the restraints which it involves, he feels himself, in his pure manhood, strong, untrammelled, and free. It is in this sense that he utters the memorable phrase: "The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone."



In practically outlawing him, his fellow-townsmen have ejected him from the state; and he accepts the situation they have forced upon him, and felicitates himself on the freedom which it secures him. Rather than strike a cowardly compromise by the surrender of his convictions, he will stand forth in fearless isolation, and proclaim, even at the risk of martyrdom, what he believes to be true.

It will be seen that "An Enemy of the People" is a plausible and ingenious plea for anarchism. It demonstrates with much ability and force the disadvantages of the "*contrat social*," but is discreetly silent concerning the far greater disadvantages of anarchy. It is, theatrically considered, the least effective of Ibsen's modern plays, and frequently degenerates into a mere animated debate. There is not a single love episode in it, and scarcely an allusion to the tender passion. It displays the author's usual mastery in characterisation; and the arrows of his satire seem to be winged with a fiercer impetus than ever before. The cowardice, the pusillanimity, the moral obtuseness, the rat-like greed and cunning, which these "small citizens" exhibit, where their inter-

ests are at stake, have somehow a marvellous authenticity which enforces credence. Each trait bears the indelible mark of a small society, which stunts and cripples the souls of men, making them crabbed and crooked, when in a richer soil many of them might have shot boldly up into the sunlight.





## THE WILD DUCK.

IN no play of Ibsen's is the corrosive self-destroying character of his social criticism more apparent than in "The Wild Duck." "A Doll's House" and "The Pillars of Society" enforced the lesson that unless there be truth in personal and social relations they cannot endure; they are built upon sand, and cannot brave the shocks of adversity. This was perhaps the first positive lesson to be derived from Ibsen's teachings. We felt that here we had at last firm ground under our feet; and Pilate's pertinent query, "What is truth?" we left preliminarily in abeyance. But no sooner have we opened "The Wild Duck" than we find the earth rocking and heaving in the most uncomfortable manner. That which we mistook for rock was, after all, nothing but quagmire. "The Wild Duck" teaches us that the truth is by no means an unqualified boon. It

takes a strong spirit to endure it. To small, commonplace men, living in mean illusions, the truth may be absolutely destructive. It is better for such people to be permitted to cherish undisturbed their little lies and self-deceptions than to be brought face to face with the terrifying truth, lacking, as they do, both the courage and the strength to grapple with it and to readjust their lives to radically altered conditions.

It appears to me as if Ibsen had undertaken to satirise himself in this play. "I have told you before that you must above all be truthful," he seems to say; "that you must live your individual lives, and refuse to adapt yourselves to the code of conduct of your Philistine neighbours; that you must drain, if necessary, the wholesome cup of woe that is put to your lips, and rise through suffering to a higher and nobler manhood and womanhood. But if you have been innocent enough to take me at my word in these injunctions, I now find that they stand in need of revision. It is not improbable that you may be too paltry to be benefited by such heroic diet, in which case I advise you to ignore what I have

said and remain in your old slough of pusillanimous mendacity and contentment."

This is the obvious moral of "The Wild Duck," if a moral it can be called. The situation is as follows:—

Hjalmar Ekdal, a photographer in a small town, is a lazy, miserable good-for-nothing, but with a taste for theatrical phrase-making and grand attitudes. He lives a sort of heroic dream-life, devoting himself, in fancy at least, to the perfecting of a great invention, about which he talks a great deal, without, however, making any visible progress. By means of the fame which will come to him from this beneficent enterprise, he intends to obliterate the disgrace which has befallen his father, and vindicate the family honour. The elder Ekdal, an ex-lieutenant and lumber speculator, has been sentenced to the penitentiary for violation of the forestry laws, and, after having served out his sentence, is now living with his son. He earns a little money by copying documents for his former partner, the manufacturer Werle, and promptly gets drunk on part of the proceeds of his industry. He is half in his dotage, and utterly devoid

of all sense of honour. In the loft of the house he has arranged a sort of mock-forest, consisting of some old Christmas-trees, in the branches of which hens and pigeons roost. Here he has also collected some rabbits, and he amuses himself by firing at them with a pistol and a gun which always clicks. From the servants of Werle he has obtained a wild duck, which, after having been wounded by their master, had been retrieved by his dogs. Hedwig, his grand-daughter, a little girl of fourteen, takes a great fancy to this wild water-fowl, and daily spends happy hours in the dark loft, watching the rabbits and the pigeons. Her father, Hjalmar, though he makes a pretence of being deeply absorbed in scientific meditation, is rarely averse to indulging in the same sport as his parent; and, in fact, the only member of the family for whom the loft has no attraction is his wife Gina, who, by her attention to the house-keeping as well as the photographic business, is the mainstay and support of her husband, daughter, and father-in-law. She is a simple, unreflecting creature, and is therefore easily imposed upon by Hjalmar's theatricals. She honestly believes him

marriage. But in these suppositions he reckons without his host. The photographer, when he learns of his wife's former *liaison* and the paternity of his supposed child, is not so very deeply shocked; nay, at bottom, perhaps, he is nearly indifferent. But he knows what is expected of him in such a moment; and he casts about him for a truly heroic part. He must justify Gregers's opinion of him, and the demands of his own dignity. So he summons his wife, and in lofty phrases catechises her concerning her past. The poor simple soul confesses unhesitatingly. She is delightful in her blunt honesty, which contrasts so glaringly with her husband's high-flown hypocrisy. When reproached for not having confessed before their marriage, she asks, naïvely: "But would you have married me all the same?"

HJALMAR. How can you imagine such a thing?

GINA. No; but that was the reason I did not dare tell you anything then. For I got to love you very much, as you know. And I could not go and make myself completely unhappy.

When asked if she has not suffered an anguish of remorse during all these years, she replies:



“Why, dear Ekdal, I’ve had enough to do in attending to the house, and the daily supervision of things.” ,

Such callousness, such degradation, make Hjalmar despair—or, I should say, assume the mask of despair. He must (though it tires him a little) remain upon the heights of sublimity to which he has mounted. He commands Gina to pack his trunk. He must separate from her. He cannot continue to live a life of infamy, practically supported by a former rival for his wife’s favour; for he learns that Werle has constantly overpaid the elder Ekdal for his copying, and that it is this money which has enabled them to maintain their household in comfort. But now all this must come to an end. With a grand gesture, Hjalmar tears to pieces a document in which the elder Werle pledges himself to pay one hundred kroner per month to the elder Ekdal, and after the latter’s death to continue the payment of the same sum to Hedwig. With feverish impatience he makes all the preparations for his departure from his desecrated home, and revels, all the while, in the admiration of his friend Gregers. But when the

moment comes for decisive action, he wavers. On one flimsy pretext after another, he postpones his journey. He thrusts Hedwig away from him, and cruelly wounds the feelings of the affectionate child. He fumes and frets while considering the more sordid aspect of the situation which now presents itself to him. He concludes to do nothing rash; but to remain at home until he can find new lodgings. With great care he collects the scattered bits of Werle's promissory note and pastes them together, because he has no right, he avers, to renounce what is not his own. Gina brings him coffee and sandwiches, which he consumes with a lugubrious zest; and though he is a little shame-faced when Gregers surprises him in this prosaic occupation, he endeavours, though not quite successfully, to recover his heroic tone. He is really anxious to be persuaded to remain; but feels in duty bound to yield only by degrees, and with the proper amount of high-flown declamation. He enjoys the interesting situation, and cannot afford to dismiss it before having displayed his full arsenal of noble sentiments.

The child, of course, which he has cherished like

a snake in his bosom, offers unlimited opportunities for fine rhetoric; and Hjalmar does not fail to improve them. Gregers, to whom Hedwig has betrayed his grief, because her father will no longer believe that she loves him, has persuaded her to prove her love for him by the highest sacrifice in her power. And as the wild duck is the thing she is fondest of, while Hjalmar has always professed to dislike it, Gregers advises her to kill it with her own hand. But so great is her misery, her feeling of superfluity and disgrace, that she turns the pistol against herself and sends the bullet into her own heart.

/ Ibsen sums up the moral of his play in the words of Dr. Relling (a cynical friend of the family): "Life might yet be quite tolerable, if we were only left in peace by these blessed duns who are continually knocking at the doors of us poor folk with their 'ideal demand.'"

Rarely has a poet so ruthlessly satirised himself as Ibsen does in this remark. For it was this very ideal demand of which he had proclaimed himself the prophet. He is the most persistent of those duns who knock at the door of the average human

soul, and disturb its sleepful contentment by their unwearied insistence upon full payment. But the bankrupt debtor is obliged to compromise at twenty, forty, or sixty per cent, or utterly repudiate the debt; and the stern reminders of his dun cannot make him pay more than he has.

The mood in which Ibsen wrote "The Wild Duck" was one of deep dejection — if not despair. "You have got to take men as they are made," he seems to have said to himself, "and no amount of preaching will make them any better than they are. I, with my ideal demand, may have been as great a mischief-maker as Gregers Werle." And in order to emphasise this cynical lesson, he has in the relation of the elder Werle to Mrs. Sörby furnished a counter foil to the Ekdal couple, who, after the revelation of the truth, settle down in a sort of hideous shivering nudity into a barren and joyless slough, stripped of all embellishing drapery. Werle senior is an utterly prosaic person, and frankly tells his *fiancée* of all his escapades; whereupon she, encouraged by his freedom from prejudice, makes an equally compromising confession. These two then form a marriage based upon the truth; and we are

left to form our own conclusions as to the nature of their union.

No, the truth is only for the strong; and the strong are few. The ordinary man needs more or less harmless lies to bolster up his self-respect; for without self-respect there can be no contentment. This is the doctrine very trenchantly preached by Dr. Relling, who charitably devotes himself to inventing the fitting lie which will minister to the happiness of each of his patients. It is he who instils into Hjalmar's mind the idea that he is destined to make a great discovery, which will lift photography into the region of exact science; and with the same ingenuity he saves the self-respect of his bibulous friend, the theologian Molvik, by persuading him that his drunkenness is "dæmonic"; *i.e.* the necessary and inevitable outbreak of some great undelivered force within him which has not found expression in its proper sphere.

If instead of the ugly word "lie" we substitute its poetic synonym "illusion," I fancy no one will seriously object to Dr. Relling's theory. For every one of us has his own illusion of life, himself included; and his happiness depends upon the

## ROSMERSHOLM.

THAT fatal clearness of vision which enables Ibsen to see, with equal distinctness, both sides of a question is freshly illustrated in "Rosmersholm." He has, to be sure, declared: "I only ask; my task is not to answer," but in this play he certainly does answer the terrible query which he propounded in "Ghosts." Why can we not (as Mrs. Alving suggested) emancipate ourselves from the gloomy philosophy of renunciation, and fling away the heavy yoke of morality which an unenlightened and bigoted past has imposed upon us? Why can we not joyously assert our right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and, in noble pagan unrestraint, drain the brimming cup of pleasure which is presented to our lips? First, because we have long and deep roots in the past, and our feelings and desires are largely predetermined by our ancestry. We may hunger for the healthy inno-



cence of the Greek, to whom even Priapos was a god not devoid of dignity; but we can never attain it. But the second obstacle is even more insuperable. Joy pursued as an end is and must be eudæmonistic, — selfish. Indulgence is not noble. That there is also joy, as well as discipline, in renunciation Ibsen has, so far as I know, nowhere distinctly suggested, though there is a hint of it in "Emperor and Galilean," where the martyrs in fanatic enthusiasm proclaim the blessedness of suffering, sorrow, and death. I am inclined to believe that the solution of the apparently insoluble problem lies just here. The type of man which finds delight in purely altruistic activity is being slowly evolved and will in time possess the earth. Nobility of soul, which is incompatible with the pursuit of joy *per se*, is in nowise opposed to the joyous sensation, but to the primary regard for self which the pursuit involves. That is, at all events, the idea of nobility which Christianity has developed; and to emancipate ourselves from it (even if such emancipation were desirable) is, as the fate of Rosmer shows, impossible. The man of "The Third Empire" (which the sage Maximos

prophesied in "Emperor and Galilean") will probably, through the experience of centuries, modify our present conception, but the contemporary denizen of the earth who should attempt to substitute the pagan for the Christian ideal of conduct, would be doomed to destruction.

Here is then the reply to all the daring interrogations of Mrs. Alving and the refutation of her revolutionary argument. I fancy I detect a profound disillusion in "Rosmersholm," as if it had cost the old poet a bitter struggle to dismiss his early ideal of joyous innocence and noble, untrammelled self-assertion. For that ideal was the beacon by the light of which he steered in "Love's Comedy," "Emperor and Galilean," and "The Pillars of Society." It was Goethe's *καλοκάγαθια* and Schiller's "reine freie Menschlichkeit"; but they had the advantage of living before Mill and Spencer and Darwin, and they persevered in the beautiful illusion until the end.

The intrigue (if a simple concatenation of events can be so styled), though it has dramatic possibilities, seems better adapted for a novel than a play. It is a moving soul's history, the chief events

of which are related, but cannot be visibly presented. The Reverend Johannes Rosmer, a retired clergyman and the owner of the ancient estate Rosmersholm, is the last descendant of a long line of dignitaries. His wife, with whom he had lived unhappily, had, within a year, committed suicide by jumping into the millrace from the foot-bridge which crosses the stream. Her speech and conduct previous to the desperate act had been erratic and hysterical; and it is supposed that her reason was clouded. Miss Rebecca West, a lady of advanced ideas and great personal charm, was the companion of the late Mrs. Rosmer, and has remained with her widower since her death. A delightful friendship has sprung up between the two during the years of their intercourse, and Rosmer has never enjoyed such contentment as now. Miss West is intellectually awake, and her presence and conversation stimulate him to thought on unwonted lines and spread a congenial atmosphere about him. His life is invested with a fresh interest; and he conceives daring plans for benefiting mankind by emancipating it from its abject allegiance to the past in politics and religion.

One day Mr. Kroll, the head master of the public school, and brother of the late Mrs. Rosmer, calls at Rosmersholm, where he has never set foot since his sister's death. He has, in the meanwhile, been drawn into the vortex of political strife as a most furious champion of the conservative cause. Now, letting bygones be bygones, he comes to enlist Rosmer's services on the same side. As a preliminary step, he makes peace with Rebecca, who has, with good reason, suspected him of misinterpreting her relation to the pastor. This truce is, however, of short duration. Rosmer not only refuses to edit the new conservative paper, *The County News*, but he declares unreservedly his change of faith, which Kroll is not wrong in attributing to Rebecca's influence. Their relation, which, in the interest of his party, he had been willing to condone, assumes now the most revolting character; and his position as a teacher of youth and as guardian of the public morality bids him expose it in all its hideousness. It is now war to the knife. The enemy of society, the apostate from the faith of his childhood, must be made harmless. For the promotion of a good cause,

the head master thinks every meanness, every villainy, permissible. No mercy, no consideration, should be shown to the man who cuts loose from the moorings of the past.

I confess that when, during my first reading of "Rosmersholm," I had come to this point, I was under the impression that this warfare between the progressive and the reactionary elements in society, and the weapons which the latter employed against the former were to be the theme of the play. To treat such a theme effectively, however, the author would have had to be a partisan of the one cause or the other. And Ibsen sees the relativity of things too plainly to be a partisan. His view is too Olympic, too astrally remote and elevated above the petty concerns of the hour. In "Rosmersholm" he holds the balance scrupulously even between the conservatives and the liberals, and though he spares neither, demonstrates the justification, nay, the necessity, of each.

The second act opens with a brief scene between Rebecca and Rosmer, in which it appears that she has, without his consent, given Ulric Brendel (a former tutor of Rosmer's) a letter of introduction

to Mr. Mortensgaard, the editor of *The Beacon*, and the radical leader in the district. The shrinking fastidiousness of the man of many ancestors is hinted at in Rosmer's mild reprobation of her act. Mortensgaard is not only a vulgarian who is politically in bad odour with all genteel people, but he has been guilty of certain matrimonial irregularities which Rosmer had, years ago, exposed and publicly denounced.

While this discussion is in progress, Mr. Kroll arrives, and after having expressed his astonishment at the informality of Rebecca's toilet, demands a private conversation with Rosmer. He bluntly reveals to him that his wife was in nowise demented, but had killed herself in order to enable him to marry Miss West. She had confided to him her distress at Rosmer's religious apostasy; and she believed that a man who doubted God's word would be capable of anything. She had declared that "they might soon expect the white horse at Rosmersholm," this being (like the white lady of the Hohenzollerns) a portent of a death in the family. When Kroll had tried to talk her out of her melancholy fancies and soothe her agitation, she had



answered: "I have not long to live; for Johannes must marry Rebecca at once."

The surprise, the shock, the horror, of Rosmer at this revelation may well be imagined. He knows that his relation to Miss West is perfectly blameless, and it hurts him to have it desecrated by foul suspicions. To him Rebecca is a woman not only of transcendent intellect, but of a moral purity even more exalted. In sorrow rather than in anger he repels his brother-in-law's accusations, and expresses an innocent amazement at the latter's tactics, which he is yet far from fathoming. But in the following phrases the "saviour of society" with all his pharisaical slyness is unmasked:—

KROLL. What I mean is this: if your present mode of life with Miss West is to continue, it is absolutely necessary that the change of views—the unhappy back-sliding—brought about by her evil influence should be hushed up. Let me speak! let me speak! I say, if the worst comes to the worst, in Heaven's name think and believe whatever you like. . . . But you must keep your views to yourself. It is purely a personal matter, after all. There is no need of proclaiming these things from the housetops.

All his moral indignation had therefore been shammed. What he really sought was a strategic advantage. And this he exploits to the utmost. Having been finally repelled by Rosmer, he departs in high dudgeon, and the next morning publishes in his paper a series of the most contemptible innuendoes and hints of scandalous revelations to come, all pointing plainly to Rosmer, but without mentioning his name.

While the excitement of this interview is still vibrating in Rosmer's mind, his old enemy, Mortensgaard, is announced, and a conversation is recorded which bristles with quiet, delightful satire. Rosmer permits the editor to publish in *The Beacon* a plain statement of the change which his political and religious views have undergone, and is surprised when the editor objects. He will gladly give publicity to his political defection, he says, but to descant upon his religious apostasy would be to deprive the radical party of all advantage from his adhesion. Though Mortensgaard is himself a free-thinker, he declares that there are already too many of that ilk in the radical camp. What they now need is "a Christian element." It is Rosmer's

respectability they want to profit by, not his sincerity and his undiplomatic zeal. When pressed for an explanation, he declares that the pastor cannot afford to take any risks in the equivocal position in which he is placed by the suicide of his wife. The late Mrs. Rosmer had, in fact, addressed a letter to Mortensgaard, contradicting certain rumours which she believed to be in vogue regarding her husband's relations to Miss West. Rosmer, whether he was innocent or not, was therefore no longer above suspicion, and he would further compromise the radical party, instead of benefiting it, if he openly abjured his faith. For in the popular mind, as Kroll had said, there was no unfathomable gulf between free thought and free love; and no one would believe that an emancipated man and an emancipated woman who lived in the same house would be likely to sustain a platonic relation.

Shocked and grieved as Rosmer is by these revelations, he is yet strong in his faith in Rebecca and the consciousness of his own blamelessness. He resolves to cut all bridges behind him and enter at once upon his great work of emancipation. He will proclaim the beautiful gospel of

joy; he will break the fetters of the past, and labour to make men free and noble. He will make "joyful noblemen," he says, "for it is joy which ennobles the mind"; and he is obviously a little surprised when Rebecca suggests that a great sorrow is also ennobling. He must establish new relations with the world, and not permit the haunting spectre of the past, which persists in rising before him, to strangle his aspirations and paralyse his energy. There is but one way to shake off all the gnawing memories, and that is to marry Rebecca. It is significant that he does not say a word about rehabilitating her reputation by giving her a legally recognised position. The Philistine point of view does not occur to him. But the suspicion has entered his mind that this beautiful friendship of theirs, in the purity of which he has rejoiced, is scarcely distinguishable from love. And, moreover, he needs the inspiration of Rebecca's presence in the life work which he is about to undertake. Great is therefore his surprise when, with a cry of joy, she refuses him. A superstitious fear of taking the place of the dead wife, who seems yet ever present, prevents her from accepting what

she has so ardently desired. The ghost which she was to banish is stronger than she, and refuses to yield its place to her.

Profoundly disheartened, Rosmer faces the conviction that he must renounce all claim to happiness; and with this conviction, the joyous energy which was stirring in his breast is benumbed and dies. Nothing within him now responds to Rebecca's eager appeal. His humanitarian enthusiasm refuses to be rekindled. With morbid persistence he dwells upon the circumstances of his wife's life and death, and the tragedy of her love for him. "She looked at our relation with the eyes of *her* love," he says to Miss West; "judged it from *her* love's point of view. Inevitably Beata could not have judged otherwise than she did."

In conscientious self-torture he writhes under his sense of guilt. He feels in himself a great capacity for a happiness which by the laws of his being he is debarred from enjoying. All the grave, well-regulated, self-denying Rosmers of the past rise in a shadowy procession, and restrain the hand that would lift the cup of joy to his famished lips. It appears to me that this is beautifully subtle. There

are no leaps, no yawning gaps, in the spiritual evolution. We are but infinitesimal links in the endless chain of life, and we cohere, spiritually, as physically, with all the preceding links as with all the succeeding ones. Whatever hardships this cohesion may entail, it invests life with a dignity which in a measure compensates for the restraint.

The conduct of Rebecca in the last scene might seem rather enigmatical. She certainly is not hampered by the solemn ghosts of ancestral dignitaries. On the contrary, she is an illegitimate child, reared by a free-thinking father in the laxest notions of morality. We learn, later, that she has had some discreditable episode in her career, some compromising experience of an amorous kind. Since we are assured that she loves Rosmer, why does she permit a mere superstitious fear of the dead to rob her of the joy of life? In answering this question, Ibsen betrays his usual insight into the complexities of feminine emotions. It is almost a shock, in the following scene, to have Rebecca unmasked by Kroll as an adventuress and a criminal schemer, who had herself been the author of the rumour which had driven Mrs. Rosmer to suicide.

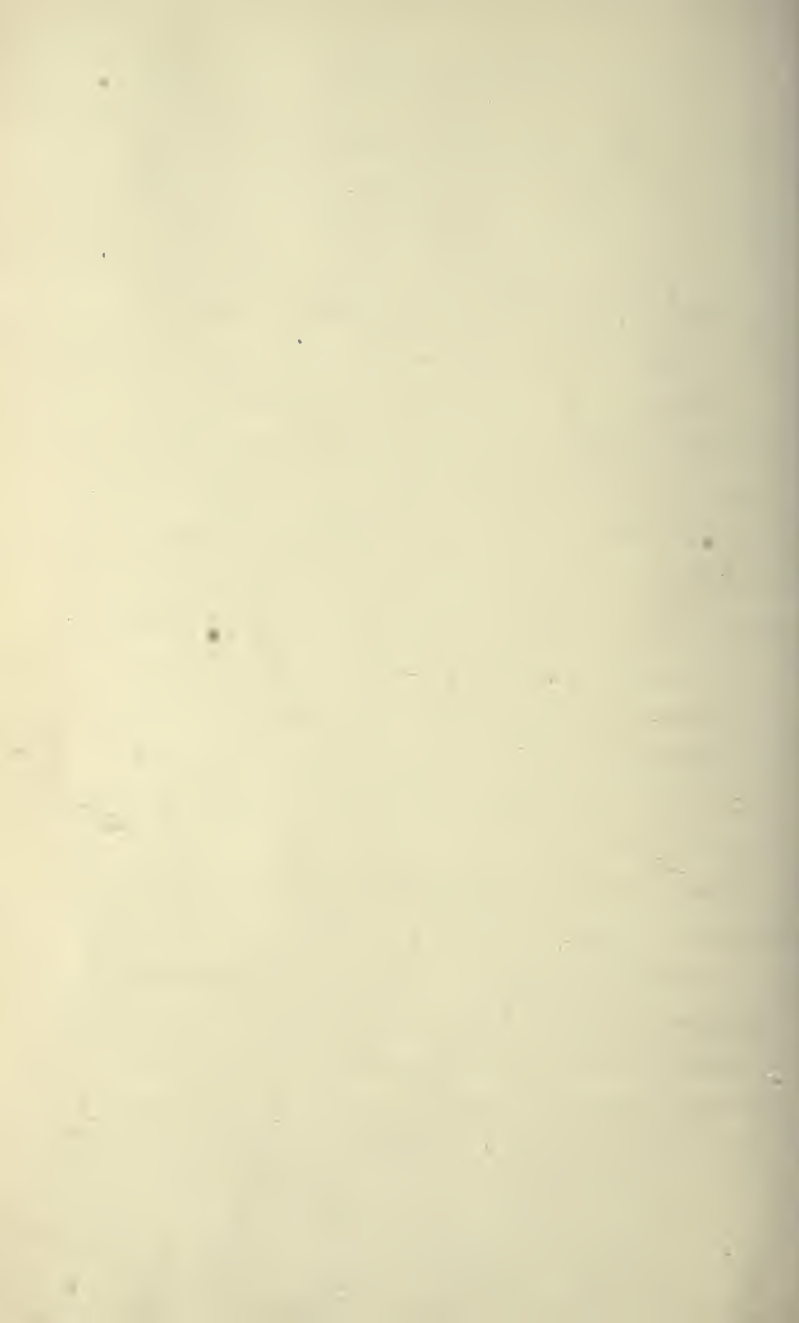


In fact, she confesses that, having conceived an uncontrollable passion for Rosmer, she deliberately invented the story of their illicit relation; at last, even professing to be with child, in order to work upon the sympathies of the childless wife, and urge her to self-destruction.

The effect of this revelation upon Rosmer is overwhelming. The horror of the thing stuns him, and makes the daylight hideous. Kroll, taking advantage of his unnerved condition, induces him to recant all his heresies, and lapse back into dull, respectable, and incurious orthodoxy. The repose of despair takes possession of him. The terrific disillusion to which he has been subjected seems to have knocked the props from under all creation, and reduced the world to senseless chaos. He agrees with Rebecca that she must leave him, and consents rather reluctantly to listen to her last confession. She now tells him how, after having accomplished her purpose, though with many fears and misgivings, she had fallen under the spell of the Rosmersholm view of things, and had begun to regard herself and her actions with different eyes. Her will had become enslaved to laws which she

had never before recognised. His moral purity and noble disinterestedness had formed, as it were, an atmosphere about her, which she had breathed so long that it had changed her substance, and made her afraid to seize the fruit of her evil scheming. Her passion for him had changed to a love as pure, as capable of sacrifice, as that of his late wife. He is prone to believe, but, having been so cruelly deceived, cries out for a proof. Even though she has shaken his faith in her his love which has struck deep roots into his heart, cannot be torn up in an hour. Rebecca offers the same proof as she who died; and Rosmer, being now convinced, resolves to follow her in death. And they walk out into the night together, hand in hand, mount the foot-bridge, and, embracing each other, leap into the cataract.

The Romans were right in offering sacrifices to the *Manes* of their ancestors. For the hands of the dead are upon the lives of the living; and, whether we would or not, we have to yield our daily tribute of sacrifice.



## THE LADY FROM THE SEA.

A LESSON which is by no means new, but which, for all that, stands in need of frequent repetition, is taught with much originality and subtile symbolism in "The Lady from the Sea." Goethe has uttered it with Attic clearness and felicity in the well-known sonnet entitled "Nature and Art."

For pure perfection's height will unrestrained  
Wild spirits vainly strive, with sure disaster.  
By well-directed strength is greatness gained ;  
In limitation proves himself the master,  
*And but through law can freedom be attained.*

Substitute for "pure perfection's height" "the height of happiness," and you have the moral of "The Lady from the Sea." "Rosmersholm," by inference, if not by direct declaration, seemed to deny the possibility of earthly happiness. Every pleasant pavilion which is the dwelling of joy is bolted and barred to the famishing soul; and for

ampler precaution a police regulation, beginning "Thou shalt not," is pasted on the door. Though, to be sure, the symbol of the law in "Rosmersholm" was not a policeman with a club, but rather a judge sitting in private chambers, it was yet stern, forbidding, relentless. But if the law is not imposed upon us by an outside power, but has its seat in our own hearts, is obedience to it, then, a curtailment of liberty, or is it even a deprivation? Is it not easy to imagine circumstances under which a violation of the law would (quite apart from social penalties) involve the greater deprivation and the greater sacrifice of freedom?

Ibsen answers this query in "The Lady from the Sea" affirmatively. A voluntary submission to the moral law, or to the social institution in which it is embodied, may lead to contentment, perhaps to happiness. The total unrestraint of the undisciplined spirit, coming into inevitable collision with the social order, results in suffering; and the only liberty in which there is noble joy is that which accepts the law, enthroned in the heart, and moves in instinctive conformity to it.

I may perhaps be going somewhat beyond legiti-

mate inference in reaching this latter conclusion. But instead of anticipating the story, I shall relate it, so as to enable the reader to judge.

Dr. Wangle, a cultivated, kindly, and honourable man, has taken for his second wife Ellida, the daughter of a lighthouse-keeper. He has two daughters, Bolette and Hilda, the former of whom is grown, and the second on the verge of young womanhood. They both dislike their stepmother; and, as a demonstration of hostility to her, celebrate, rather ostentatiously, the anniversaries of their own mother's birth. They deprive Ellida, though not without fault of her own, of all share in the house-keeping, and do their best to make her feel herself a stranger in the family. There are, however, deeper causes which tend in the same direction. Ellida, having been born by the ocean, whose mighty presence has pervaded her life from its earliest hour, is ill at ease, depressed, and miserable by the narrow fjord, shut in on all sides by the mountains. She is like a mermaid who has strayed into inland waters, and now lies helpless, dying by inches, in a stagnant cove, where the sand-fleas leap and the hermit-crabs crawl over her, and the star-fishes suck themselves



fast to her white limbs. Her restless discontent finds expression in strange caprices due to overstrained nerves. She is perpetually bathing, though she professes to find no refreshment in the brackish waters of the fjord. The very first time she appears, it is with wet hair hanging down over her shoulders, as if she had just emerged from her "natural element." In fact, she is more than half in earnest in her contention, that man was meant to be an aquatic animal. "I believe," she says, "that if men had only accustomed themselves to live on the sea, or even in the sea, we should by this time have been far more perfect than we are,—both better and happier."

Extremely clever is the manner in which Ibsen gradually reveals the secret which weighs upon Ellida's mind. A consumptive ex-sailor, named Lyngstrand, who is about to become a sculptor, relates to her, with the guileless egotism of an invalid, his dreams and aspirations, and describes a group which he is yearning to model as soon as his skill shall suffice. It is to represent the ghost of a drowned sailor returning in the night to take vengeance upon his faithless wife. When asked

what had suggested this curious subject, he tells how he was once wrecked in the British Channel; and how, on this last voyage of his, he had made the acquaintance of an American boatswain who had had the very experience to which he had referred. "Well, there he sat in the fo'c's'le, reading away as usual at one of his old papers, . . . when all of a sudden I heard him give a kind of yell; and when I looked at him, I saw that his face was white as chalk. Then he set to work to crumple up and crush the paper and tear it into a thousand pieces; but that he did quietly, quietly. . . . Presently he said to himself: 'Married—to another man—while I was away.'"

ELLIDA (*shuts her eyes and says half to herself*). Did he say that?

LYNGSTRAND. Yes; and would you believe it, he said it in perfectly good Norwegian. He must have a great gift for languages, that man.

ELLIDA. And what then? What happened next?

LYNGSTRAND. Now comes the wonderful part of it—a thing I shall never forget to my dying day. For he added—and this quite quietly too: "But mine she is, and mine she shall be. And follow me she shall, though I should have to go home and fetch her as a drowned man from the dark sea."

This man, it is needless to say, is the cause of Ellida's melancholy. She had once engaged herself to him when, as mate of a foreign ship, he came to her island, though he confessed to her that he had murdered his captain. But so powerful was his will over hers that she had believed him on his mere word, when he had assured her that right and justice had required him to act as he did. They had met at evening on the beach, and talked together "about the sea; about storm and calm; about dark nights at sea; about the sea in the glittering sunshine, too, . . . and it seemed as though both the sea-animals and the sea-birds were akin to him."

She seemed wholly at his mercy when she was with him; and when he was gone and she recovered her senses, all that had happened seemed utterly inexplicable. But before their final parting he had given her a ring and taken another from her finger, and slipping the two on a key ring, he had flung them far out into the waves, saying that "they must wed themselves with the sea."

Since that time she had received several letters

from him ; and although she had, long since, broken the engagement, he still wrote as if their relations were unchanged, and calmly told her that "she must wait for him ; and when he was ready, she must come to him at once." But since the day he read her marriage in the papers, she had not heard from him. And now Lyngstrand informed her that he was shipwrecked in the British Channel and drowned. She felt, however, that he was still alive, and that he would come for her.

The symbolic meaning of this story lies by no means on the surface. The mysterious stranger who is so singularly identified with the sea that "the very allurements and awe of it" are in his eyes, is the free, lawless, untrammelled will which spurns the restraints of the state and organised society. What human soul is there which, ere it resigns itself to the bondage of discipline, has not felt with a wild zest the allurements of a savage liberty? Nay, is there any among us who, even in the midst of well-regulated civic activity, is not startled, at times, by the convulsive throes of the chained Titans within him, rebelling against their servitude? We can trace this rebellion in

Ibsen through the whole series of his works. It is the theme upon which he has rung the changes in major and in minor keys.

The sea, being the untamable element, which has resisted all efforts to curb its lawless energy, lends itself well to this symbolism. That the stranger has committed murder; that he has no name, or several names; that he calmly ignores Ellida's marriage, and is guided purely by his own desires, are traits expressive of his complete detachment from civilisation and the social state. Though the author, with explicit stage directions, has endeavoured to give him a corporeal presence, he remains too utterly allegorical to be successfully clothed in flesh and blood. Even "his travelling-dress, Scotch cap, and bushy reddish hair and beard" fail to individualise him in the sense that Dr. Wangel, Hilda, Boletta, and Lyngstrand are individualised.

Wangel himself, though he, too, has a symbolic significance, is by no means inconvenienced by it. He is the average, unaspiring, good-natured man, who lives the life of a quiet, respectable citizen, absorbed in the small concerns of the average

lot. In this capacity he forms the most complete antithesis to the roving stranger, being law-bound, checked by custom, and hedged in by innumerable restraints. Ellida's enforced subjection to the laws and rules which govern him represents, I fancy, the condition in which most of us find ourselves. We have had no choice in the matter, any more than Ellida had; in fact, probably less. We are simply here; and our being here is pre-determined by causes and circumstances which are beyond our control. Ellida, though she persists in reiterating that she was sold to Dr. Wangel; that, being poor, almost destitute, she had no choice but to accept the home that he offered her on the condition which he attached to the offer, had yet a possibility of escape open to her if she had had the courage to avail herself of it. However, let us dismiss that possibility and accept the author's view that she was not a free agent. The stranger, whom she dreads rather than loves, returns, as she has been expecting. He demands of her that she shall follow him; and on her refusal departs, promising to come back with his steamer on the evening of the following day. Her husband



interposes for her protection, threatening to have her persecutor arrested for murder. But she disdains to be freed by such methods. And now, to the horror of the good Doctor, she begs him to "cancel the bargain" and restore to her full liberty. Being utterly unable to comprehend the mysterious workings of her mind, he holds it to be his duty to protect her from herself; and when, at the appointed hour, the stranger reappears, he is at her side. The following conversation, through every phrase of which the deeper symbolism shimmers, is worth giving in full:—

STRANGER. . . . I ask you, then, if you are ready to come with me—to come with me of your own free will?

ELLIDA (*imploringly*). Oh, do not ask me! Do not tempt me so!

(*A steamer-bell is heard in the distance.*)

THE STRANGER. . . . Now you must say yes or no.

ELLIDA (*wrings her hands*). To decide! To decide for life! To choose irrevocably!

THE STRANGER. Irrevocably. In half an hour it will be too late.

ELLIDA (*looks timidly and inquiringly at him*). What makes you cling to me so persistently?

THE STRANGER. Do you not feel, as I do, that we two belong to each other?

ELLIDA. Do you mean because of my promise?

THE STRANGER. Promises bind no one: neither man nor woman. If I cling persistently to you, it is because — because I cannot do otherwise.

ELLIDA (*softly and tremblingly*). Why did you not come sooner?

WANGEL. Ellida!

ELLIDA (*with an outburst of emotion*). Oh! what is it that tempts, and allures, and entices — towards the unknown! The whole might of the sea concentrated upon me!

Dr. Wangel, seeing how far she has slipped away from him, how utterly hopeless it is for him to win her back, now renounces all his claim upon her, and gives her full permission to depart in peace with the Stranger. She must, he says, bear the full responsibility for her actions.

ELLIDA (*clasps her head with her hands and gazes fixedly towards Wangel*). In freedom — and on my own responsibility? Responsibility, too? — that transforms everything.

(*The steamer-bell rings again.*)

THE STRANGER. Do you hear, Ellida? They are ringing for the last time. Come away!

ELLIDA (*turns towards him, looks fixedly at him, and says with decision in her voice*). I can never go with you after this.

THE STRANGER. You will not go?

ELLIDA (*clings to Wangel*). Oh, after this I will never leave you.

WANGEL. Ellida ! Ellida !

THE STRANGER. It is all over, then ?

ELLIDA. Over for all time !

THE STRANGER. So I see. There is something here that is stronger than my will.

ELLIDA. Your will has no longer a feather's weight with me. For me you are a dead man who has come home from the sea — and who is returning to it again. But I am no longer in awe of you. You allure me no more.

THE STRANGER. Good-bye, Mrs. Wangel. (*He vaults over the fence.*) Henceforth you are nothing but — a bygone shipwreck in my life.

Ellida, having chosen submission to law rather than lawless freedom, now endeavours to fill her place in Wangel's household which she had hitherto left vacant. She voluntarily assumes the duties of her position, and with a full appreciation of her responsibilities. She endeavours to draw towards her the younger of the two step-daughters whom she had hitherto neglected. She accepts, once for all, her lot "as a land-animal," and is cured of her longing for the sea. And we are left to infer that she is spiritually acclimated and finds contentment in the common lot.

## HEDDA GABLER.

ONE is so accustomed to look for problems in Ibsen, that a play of his without a problem strikes one as a novelty. In each of his works since "The Pretenders" (1864) there was a distinct philosophical proposition which he desired to prove or disprove. In "Hedda Gabler," though it is easy to trace its derivation from earlier plays, notably "Ghosts" and "Rosmersholm," there is no attempt to expound a thesis. The author has seized in Hedda a very modern type of woman, which might be taken as a caricature of his own doctrine. Just as "The Wild Duck" is a response to "The Pillars of Society," and "Rosmersholm" to "Ghosts," so "Hedda Gabler" may, without any stretch of imagination, be regarded as a dramatic epilogue to the two latter plays, and an amplification of the proposition which they elucidate. If (to borrow the argument of a French commenta-

tor<sup>1</sup>) Mrs. Alving's pagan ideals were to take possession of a woman, devoid of heart, and but moderately gifted in intellect, would they not in practice prove most dangerous? That complete perversion of womanhood, which Ibsen exhibits in "Hedda Gabler," is the result of the very emancipation which Mrs. Alving advocated, unrestrained by the impulses which we have been taught to regard as inherent in the sex. Hedda's insatiable vanity, her hunger for new sensations, her imperious demand for pleasure, no matter at whose expense, her distaste for duties, her horror of maternity, and a certain ruthless selfishness which calmly treads under foot every person or thing that stands in her way, mark her as a *fin de siècle* product which has long since invaded French literature, but has, so far, remained unrepresented in that of Norway. The pagan "joy of living" (*la joie de vivre*) planted in the soil of a sterile heart will be likely to bear just this kind of fruit. Ibsen has therefore placed this sign-post with its warning inscription, "Beware, Dangerous Crossing," at the ford leading to the

<sup>1</sup> Auguste Ehrhard, "Henrik Ibsen et le Théâtre Contemporain," Paris, 1892, pp. 443, 444.

alluring land whither Mrs. Alving cast yearning glances.

The play has very little action of the noisy kind demanded by the lovers of melodrama. Dr. George Tesman, a young scholar, and an aspirant for a vacant professorship, has just returned with his wife Hedda from his wedding journey. He is a *savant* of the minute, pedantic kind, who delights in surrounding himself with the dust of ancient learning and in sniffing the smell of musty folios. During his wedding journey he has been collecting material for a book on "The Weaving Industry of Brabant during the Middle Ages," and has brought back with him a whole satchel-full of notes, copied from rare volumes in foreign libraries. In the meanwhile, his wife, who takes a scornful view of his pursuits, has been having a stupid time, and comes home in no amiable humour. She has married Tesman, not because of any particular liking for him, but because he was the only one of her many adorers who had made her a formal proposal of marriage. She was then twenty-nine years old, and could not afford to disdain any respectable offer. Her father, General Gabler, is a widower, and she has inherited



nothing from him except expensive tastes, few scruples, and a pair of pistols. Tesman is to her a *pis aller*—a makeshift, and not a very happy one. In the intolerable boredom which weighs upon a life destitute of ideals, illusions, and convictions, it seemed of slight consequence what she did with herself, and for want of anything better to do, she indulged a heartless caprice and inflicted the curse of her empty and loveless self upon the unsophisticated scholar. It does not occur to her, however, that, in assuming Tesman's name, she incurs any obligations towards him or his family. The doting old aunt who has brought him up, and who comes full of affectionate flutter to bid them welcome home, she snubs with cruel deliberation, professing to mistake her new bonnet (of which the old lady is very proud) for that of the maid-servant. Though she prides herself on her good breeding, she takes pleasure in inflicting pain in return for the least inferential slight to her sensitive vanity.

As to her physical presence, she is of good height, with a slim figure, and a face showing refinement and distinction. Her complexion is pale and a trifle opaque, her hair of "a pretty medium brown," and

her steel-gray eyes express a cold, unruffled repose. No wonder that she has dazzled the guileless George Tesman, whose origin is *bourgeois*, and whose bringing-up has been amid most modest surroundings. Men of his antecedents are apt to underrate the virtues of their own kind, and to fall in love with stylish women who will give *éclat* to their successes, and despise them for not possessing the qualities which they admire.

Hedda had just finished administering a series of snubs to her husband and his aunt, when she is surprised by the arrival of an old schoolmate, Thea Elvsted, who comes to inquire for Eilert Lövborg, a former friend of Tesman, and his rival for the professorship. (Lövborg had been well acquainted with Hedda, too, and a curious kind of intimacy had existed between them.) That invisible wall of reserve which in well-bred society is raised between men and women Hedda had deliberately broken down in her intercourse with Eilert, by the audacious questions she asked him concerning a side of his experience which even a rake will conceal from women for whose good opinion he cares. A baneful, restlessly prying curiosity concerning the

*demi-monde* and its doings possessed General Gabler's daughter; and Eilert Lövborg, after some hesitation, had gradually yielded to her importunity, and told her all that she desired to know. The result was that, mistaking her character, he forgot himself in her presence, and she had to threaten him with a pistol, to bring him to his senses. Since that revolting episode, Eilert had disappeared from Hedda's life, and retired into the country as the private tutor of Sheriff Elvsted's children. He had made an earnest effort to give up drink, and to abandon his vicious habits; and, by the aid of the Sheriff's young wife, he had become a changed man. He has recently published a book on "The History of Civilisation," which has made a sensation in learned circles, and he is now looming up as a formidable competitor to the pedantic and second-rate George Tesman; for Lövborg, with all his aberrations, is a man of genius, who has the defects as well as the merits of his quality.

Hedda, whose interest in him has been revived by Mrs. Elvsted's inquiries, feigns a hypocritical delight at seeing her schoolmate, and lavishes caresses and endearing terms upon her, in order to

worm herself into her confidence. No sooner has she obtained a glimpse of the pure and beautiful relation which has existed between Thea and Eilert than she becomes possessed of a vague irritation, which grows and grows, until it becomes an unappeasable jealousy. Like the Chinese princess in Heine, whose fingers itched to tear the most precious stuffs, and whose ears were pleasantly tickled by the sound of tearing, Hedda is animated by an overmastering desire to destroy this friendship which has been Lövborg's salvation. Her vanity cannot suffer the thought that this insignificant little woman, with her blonde hair and appealing eyes, should have more influence with him than her own imperious self. Without fully formulating her plan, but only following the malevolent impulses of the moment, she now endeavours to draw Eilert back into her own net, to re-establish her own sway over him, and frustrate Thea's work of rescue. /

In order to accomplish this, she induces her husband to write his rival a cordial letter, inviting him to his house, and renewing their old relations. For the sake of gratifying her destructive instinct, she is willing to ignore the grievous insult she has

suffered at Lövborg's hands. Little does the guileless Thea suspect, as she yields to Hedda's blandishments and freely unbosoms herself, that she is placing Eilert at her mercy, and undoing in a day the patient and arduous work of years.

Their *tête-à-tête* is interrupted by the arrival of Assessor Brock, a middle-aged, aristocratic libertine and epicurean *viveur*, who, though no whit better than Lövborg, has the prudence to cover up his tracks and the discretion "to take his pleasures like a gentleman." Being clever, cynical, and extremely *risqué* in his remarks, he serves to dispel the boredom which hangs like a leaden cloud in Hedda's matrimonial sky, and is therefore always welcome. But he too (though more deeply versed in the wiles of the serpent than Lövborg) is in danger of jumping to the conclusion that interest in the forbidden topic argues a willingness to compromise one's self. / Psychologically considered, Hedda's prurient curiosity is in perfect accord with her passionless coldness and her dread of scandal. In fact, it is an extremely subtle point which Ibsen has here made; and one which experience has amply confirmed.



Mr. Brock, after a good deal of circuitous skirmishing, proposes to Hedda a triangular friendship, of which he himself intends to be the principal beneficiary. Hedda, who has been accustomed to use towards him a great freedom of language, cautiously accepts his overtures. She laughs at the ridiculous idea of loving her husband, without perceiving how she dishonours herself by the admission, and cynically divulges the sordid motives which had governed her marriage. She is under the impression that such *blasé* and cold-blooded worldliness is *distingué*, and characteristic of the highest society. But she utterly deceives herself in this, as in every other instance, in regard to what is really aristocratic. It is a small *bourgeois* soul's aping of aristocracy which she illustrates, not the *noblesse* which is a quality of blood, transmitted through generations, and therefore unconscious.

While Hedda and Brock are discussing these and other delicate subjects, Lövborg arrives and betrays by his appearance that he has made a successful fight against his old enemies. Hedda places wine before him and urges him to drink. But he refuses. She teases and taunts him in vain; he is not to



be moved, for he has now a great life-work to uphold him. The book he has published he holds to be of no great moment, for it is only his safe, conservative ideas he has there embodied. But he has just completed a far greater work dealing with the future development of civilisation, and poured into it his very soul, in the primal heat of inspiration. In this work Mrs. Elvsted has been his constant companion, secretary, and helper. Without her, he declares, he could never have written the book, upon which his life and his whole future are now staked. He has brought the manuscript with him to show to Tesman, and he is burning to read him a few chapters. When Thea presently arrives, there is more talk of the happy collaboration of which the book is the result; and Lövborg, in grateful recognition of what he owes to the woman who has sacrificed so much for his sake, calls it her child, — their child, — in which both have an equal share. Like an uneasy mouse that scurries to and fro with black, eager eyes, behind the wainscoting, Hedda's envy is keenly aroused by this avowal. The ambition to mould a human destiny is, with her, a mere vulgar avidity to show

her power; not, as with Thea, a need to sacrifice herself for those whom she loves. The latter need is so alien to her nature that, I fancy, she would scarcely comprehend it. At the same time, she dislikes the sentiments which she feels to be beyond her, and is animated by a positive hate of those who are capable of pure motives and nobly unselfish actions.

Making a contemptible use of the confidences she has extorted from Thea, she stings Lövborg's pride, and goads him into rebellion against his benefactress. By a deliberate accident she drops a remark implying that his reform is not to be trusted, and that Thea has come to the city to look after him. Instantly he starts up wounded to the quick, and in a paroxysm of wrath and defiance drains glass after glass. Thereupon he accompanies Tesman to Brock's bachelor supper, drinks himself into a perfect frenzy, loses the manuscript of his book, and finishes the night at a most disreputable resort. Tesman, who has walked behind him, picks up the manuscript and gives it to Hedda for safe-keeping, meaning to return it to Lövborg as soon as he has recovered from the effects of his revels. But

Hedda, having gotten into her power this "child of Eilert and Thea," is possessed of an evil joy; and instead of returning it, burns it leaf by leaf in the stove. She then tells Tesman that she has committed this infamous act for his sake, in order to rid him of a dangerous rival. Although horrified, he is yet flattered by such devotion, and readily pardons her. When Lövborg, half recovered from his carouse, but utterly broken in spirit, calls later in the day, she rejoices in the evidence of his ruin, because it proves that she has frustrated the designs of "that pretty little fool" who had her "finger in a man's destiny." When, believing that he has lost his manuscript in the disreputable resort, he threatens to kill himself, she presents him with one of her pistols, and asks him "to do it beautifully." For among her perverted sentiments is also an admiration for suicide, which she regards as highly dramatic and interesting. Only it must be so arranged as not to offend the sense of beauty.

Lövborg, in the depth of his humiliation and despair, feeling that with the loss of his book all that he valued in himself has perished, plunges headlong into the mire of debauchery and is pres-

ently found dead, whether by his own hand or another's is uncertain. Assessor Brock, who recognises Hedda's pistol, foreshadows a trial with scandalous revelations. All, he says, depends upon his silence, which, he dexterously hints, can only be secured by a return favour. Hedda having forced him to be tolerably explicit on this point, and seeing herself helpless in his clutches, with the prospect of being implicated in a hideous scandal, seizes the remaining pistol and ends her life.

The moral of all this, you will say, is neither striking nor novel. Perhaps not ; but it is interestingly enforced, and in strict accordance with modern conditions. The simple happiness and dignity of the poor plebeian old maid, Miss Tesman, who never thinks of herself, whose life is a perpetual sacrifice as compared with the *ennui* and sham dignity of the aristocratic Hedda, who lives only for herself, and the gratification of her own desires, is an antithesis which can never grow old, and the moving power of which depends upon the skill displayed in its exposition. And for further emphasis of the lesson, we have the "insignificant little fool," Thea Elvsted, who, by the mere sweetness and faith

of her womanhood, lifted the fallen man, inspired him to noble work, and would have rescued him from his baser self, if Hedda had not snatched him away from her and reasserted her baneful influence.

Surely Ibsen was the last poet to whom you would have gone for so old-fashioned a lesson. He has, however, as has been abundantly shown, the habit of revising his old opinions, and questioning his convictions, submitting them to fresh and more searching tests; and it ought to surprise no one, if being only bent on finding this truth, he occasionally ends by confirming the very thesis which he started by subverting.

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